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TRINITY

By the Same Author

NEGROHEAD

GREEN BUTTERFLIES

RAT'S CASTLE

A MIRROR OF SILVER

AND ALL THAT BEAUTY

LEGION: FOR WE ARE MANY

TRINITY

by

ROY BRIDGES

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To
W. P. HURST,
Editor of the "Australasian",
Melbourne, and friend—gratefully.

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TRINITY

CHAPTER I

PARENT OR GUARDIAN?

SCHOOL would open on Monday morning. The boarders would arrive at Carrick House on Friday and Saturday. Schoolrooms and dormitories were all in order for the reception of Mrs. Carrick's girls and for inspection by parents or guardians of new pupils. Mrs. Carrick, Miss Carrick, and Miss Julia Carrick, were at home from three to five o'clock in the afternoon to parents or guardians.

Miss Carrick had spared Mrs. Carrick and Miss Julia the fatigue of supervising the maidservants through the preliminary and remorseless campaign waged with brooms, pails, mops, scrubbing-brushes, dusters and beeswax; the house had been swept and garnished a week since, but its spotless order must be maintained from day to day now that the Christmas holidays were ending. The Matron would not return from her vacation and resume her salaried duties till Friday. Mamma and Julia must be free to receive parents or guardians with confidence that the house would be sedate and seemly, without personal exertion or responsibility on their parts. The pillared grey house in its decorous grounds—all this whiteness of muslin and dimity before its gleaming windows,

with their pale green shutters, all this cool and spacious stiffness of parlour, these shining surfaces of rosewood, of satinwood, of mahogany—and of deal—these polished hall floors, and staircase, and dustless carpets, rugs, and drugget—the long schoolroom and the small class-rooms, with their maps, their globes, their desks and forms, the dormitories, with their lean white beds, their wardrobes, their dressing-tables, their screens and their pegs; this study with its writing-desk, its bookcases, its classic busts of plaster—these white-capped, white-aproned, black-gowned maids—were mere attributes to the dignity of Mrs. Carrick and the elegance of Miss Julia.

Not the decorum of Carrick House, not even its scholastic attainment, but the sheer personality of its Headmistress, supplemented with the good looks and fashion of her younger daughter and chief assistant, Miss Julia, distinguished the school among boarding and day schools for the daughters of gentlefolk in Hobarton. Hester Carrick, though admittedly accomplished, was a mere shadow, a nonentity, she knew; dear Mamma and Julia were all.

Mrs. Carrick and the Misses Carrick had received parents and guardians from Monday, and this was Wednesday. Hester, after her meagre and hasty lunch—Mamma had scolded her gently for her late arrival at table and the dusty shabbiness of her print frock—had superintended all preparation for the entertainment of fashionable—and favoured—parents or guardians. Cake baskets, plates of thin bread and butter, the best silver teapots polished, and charged with a minimum of tea to the prospective maximum of refreshment, milk

jugs and sugar basins filled and screened from the summer flies; the china tea-set proved free from specks and set on its tray; the tea-table in the parlour covered with a cloth as white as the starched antimacassars.

The flowers in the parlour, renewed and arranged stiffly in their vases, had engaged Miss Julia's sole activity for the morning. Scarcely Hester had found time to change from her print frock to her checked foulard gown—colourless by contrast with Julie's pink-striped taffeta—and to dress her fair hair in a stiff and uncompromising roll heavy upon her neck, than she heard the wheels of the first carriage on the drive. Weary, and suffering from slight headache, she surveyed herself hastily in her tall dressing-glass. At least the stiffness and severity of her gown conveyed a sense of the faded and nebulous personality approved—nay, desired, by Mamma. The golden glint of her hair was lost in its close dressing.

She doubted whether Mamma would approve of the thinness of her face, emphasized by her sick paleness and the heaviness of her eyes, or the redness of her hands from the house-work in which she had been compelled to take an active share. Still, she would be kept in the background by her duties that afternoon—in the despatch of tea-trays from the kitchen, and in the conduct of less fashionable and less important parents or guardians on tours of dormitories and schoolrooms. Mamma in the severity of black silk, with widow's cap and mourning brooch, would receive parents or guardians and girls in the study. Julia, cool, languid and polite, would entertain waiting parents with small talk and pale China tea.

The strictness of Mrs. Carrick's social statutes allowed no possibility of clash of class or creed among parents or guardians, compelled into association through this time of awaiting admission to her presence in the study. None but the daughters of gentlefolk—of officials and the free colonial families—could hope for inclusion with Mrs. Carrick's young ladies: no daughter of emancipist however rich or prosperous or ambitious—dear me, no! Mamma's rejection of the socially inferior or questionable was frigid and final—no, Carrick House was inexpressibly exalted and exclusive, and to Hester inexpressibly boring!

The dressing-glass reflected the bitterness of her pale lips for the thought of the loneliness and constraint of her life since poor Papa's death, and the disclosure of his shattered fortunes, and the sale of the Richmond house, and Mamma's essay, if not for new fortune, at least for a livelihood as headmistress of a boarding-school for young ladies: for this her training as governess in England, and her state and fashion as her dear Henry's wife, alike befitted her. Though, Hester reflected, the last years of Papa's life had not been happy for herself!

She shut the memories of past follies and punishment swiftly from her mind; this was no time for memories, memories, for resentment at her lot—the obscurity of her life at Carrick House, the drudgery from class-room to kitchen. She detested teaching, for which she admitted no gift; she might have found interest and diversion of her mind from memories and regrets in association with the pupils—this was discouraged by Mamma. She did not blame Mamma openly—she did not confess to herself her resentment even

in thought; dear Mamma was kindness itself; if she had not forgotten the folly—if she felt still a secret fear of revelation and of irreparable injury to the credit of Carrick House, she showed no signs. She was placidly and coldly kind and tolerant always; remote in her manner to Hester, but only as to any pupil—nay as to governess, matron, or maidservant—and as alarming.

The sounds of wheels and again the sounds of wheels. Repeated knocks and ringing of the house bell. Hester went downstairs and glanced into the kitchen. Yes—the kettles were steaming on the stove; the maids were assembled; all was in readiness for Julia's ringing for the service of tea. She walked from the kitchen along the hall. She must go into the parlour in case Julia should need her assistance in the reception of obscure parents or guardians. A maid was opening the house door in answer to the loud ringing of the bell. Hester paused and glanced at the new arrivals: the tall, broad-shouldered, and sunburnt gentleman, whose black coat, white waistcoat, grey trousers, and high hat, seemed oddly to fit him ill, and the little girl, in the white muslin frock, the big, cherry-ribboned straw bonnet, and the frills and laces above black, patent leather boots. She was startled by the tone in which the gentleman asked for Mrs. Carrick. She trembled and shrank back into the shadow of the curtains at the sudden flashing light of John Holtham's steel-blue eyes, and for her instant recognition of him, and surely his recognition of her, and for this whelming flood of memories, memories, passion, hate, terror.

Hope?

CHAPTER II

OF THE PAST

THE maid was saying: "Yes, sir. This way, please, sir!"—and admitting Holtham and the child into the hall. Hester did not stir from the shadow of the curtains; her groping hands clasped the baluster of the stairs for support. The very pressure of her fingers seemed to restore reason—control of chaotic thoughts, memories, memories.

Holtham, brown, blue-eyed, and black-haired, and in the dignity of broadcloth and beaver and fine linen, seeming coarsened and vulgarized, matched by her memory of him as young, supple, and strong—her vivid and cruel memory of him! She saw the roughness of his hands as he drew off his gloves, and the glitter of a showy ring upon his finger. He handed hat, gloves, and Malacca cane to the maid.

The maid was tapping at the door of the parlour. He and the child must be prevented from entering the room; no one must know! Instantly Hester stepped forward from the shadow, and said swiftly, "Thank you, Janet! You need not announce this gentleman. Go to the kitchen, please, and carry in tea. I hear Miss Julia ringing!"—and as the maid hurried away, Hester nerved herself to face him, thinking to meet his insolent and triumphant look for the satisfaction of his revenge—as she imagined his purpose;

and whispered, "What is it? Why do you come here now?" Yet she detected in his look no vulgar arrogance, no sign of hate or reproach of her; he bowed stiffly, and his voice was polite and restrained.

"You are Miss Carrick? I think to place my daughter in Carrick House. I shall be glad to see the Headmistress."

She feared to glance at the child. She contended with a sick sense of faintness. Her eyes flickered; scarcely she could endure to look at him, or compel the faint whisper, "You shouldn't have come here. You shouldn't have done me this hurt . . . Oh, how could you?" But, hearing the opening of the study door she was silent, and shrank back.

Mamma was saying, in a clear and laughing voice, "Why, then, Mrs. Millard, I may hope to welcome Helen to Carrick House on Saturday? How delightful! Pray be assured that we shall try to make her happy with us!"—showing out a fair and graceful woman and a girl; moving beside them to the front door—in all her dignity of full skirted, rustling black silks, of rich lace, and of widow's cap; ignoring the group in the hall; offering her cheek to Mrs. Millard's kiss, and stooping to kiss her daughter. "Please convey my compliments to dear Mrs. Lydiard.* Her enjoyment of good health is so gratifying to me—pray, assure her! Good afternoon!"

Mrs. Carrick paused in the sunlit doorway, till mother and daughter had descended the steps. She turned then, and walked toward the study door, her head high and her expression betraying no

*"Negrohead".

terror or indeed concern, only ineffable contempt at her instant recognition of Holtham. She paused to murmur, "You had better come into the study . . . Hester, pray go tell Julia that I am not to be interrupted."

She entered the study; Holtham, with the little girl clinging still to his arm, would have followed her. Hester pushed blindly forward; he stood aside, and she tottered into the room, and challenged by her mother's cold displeasure and surprise: "Did you not hear me, Hester?"—she whispered, "Yes . . . and yes! But I shall stay here while this man is here! I shall know why he has come to the house. I shall hear all he has to say."

Mrs. Carrick, motionless and inflexible of look, said calmly, "Pray leave the room, Hester! You forget yourself."

"No! I remember—well I remember. And I stay here, I say, while he is here!"

"Hush!"—with swift and startled look toward the door, at the ringing of the house bell. To Holtham then, standing with the child in the open doorway, and in a voice of command as to a servant, "Do not stand there. Close the door!"

Mrs. Carrick turned then, and walked to her chair by the writing-desk and sat down. She motioned Hester to the chair to her left. Her look at Holtham, stepping forward after closing the door, and standing before her, with his left hand touching the child's shoulder, suggested lack of interest only—no such terror as affected Hester. Her brows were slightly raised, and her lips curling in faint and contemptuous amuse-

ment: "Well, my man! What do you want here? Do not waste my time. It is valuable to me."

He met her gaze with an arrogance matching her own, but, while her composure masked her thoughts or fears, his darkly handsome face, and his vivid eyes expressed his hate, his triumph, his sense of his revenge and his satisfaction from it. His voice was harsh and snarling. "You are Mrs. Carrick, of course, Headmistress of this school. I'm here to place my daughter in your charge."

"I do not understand you!" Mrs. Carrick said steadily.

"My statement is clear, surely."

"I refer to your insolence, Holtham!"

Hester was cruelly conscious of the child's shrinking back, and of her trembling, and her clinging to him, and her hiding her face in his coat.

His bow and grin were sardonic: "And yet, I think, Mrs. Carrick, you will admit my daughter to your school."

"Carrick House is open only to the daughters of gentlefolk, Holtham. You may not be aware of this. Your release and your enrichment, I believe, are so recent . . . I am averse from comment on you before this young person whom you declare your daughter, but you offer me no alternative."

"My daughter," Holtham said boldly, "knows who I am, and what I was. She has been brought up in no delicate school, Mrs. Carrick—you know this, doubtless. Your concern for her feelings alone is novel to me."

Hester turned in her chair, and now at last stared at the child—shrinking still, and trembling,

but revealing her pale and tear-stained face—her dark eyes peering at Mrs. Carrick.

"You would be wise to go, Holtham!" Mrs. Carrick said—and her voice was tinged with menace now. "You hold a conditional pardon, doubtless; but complaint from me—of insolence, threats, blackmail—from an assigned servant of my husband's—may strip you of your affluence and arrogance, and send you back to the prison whence you've come. You forget Port Arthur too soon, my man!"

With sudden snarl of voice, and imprecation, and clenching of uplifted hand, he cried out: "By God, no, madam! I've not forgotten. I'll not forget while I'm on this side of the grave. And I'll not forgive them who sent me there!"

She leaned forward from her desk—a little shaken now, by her colour and by her tone: "Hush! I'll have no disturbance here . . . disorder here . . . in my house! I warn you. I'll not tolerate this. A word to influential friends—you are aware of them, and you'll go back to Port Arthur!"

"But you'll not speak the word," he sneered. "You'll not dare speak the word!"

"Holtham," she said, contempt in her look and tone, "you should have learnt to estimate me better, and my will, and actions. From the past you should have learnt this. Your punishment was for just such an insolence as you show now—in bringing this child here, and having the effrontery to suggest that I should admit her to my house . . . my school . . . let her . . . your daughter, you say your daughter . . . move among my girls! And you think by making this

disturbance here to frighten me, and compel me to accede to your demand!"

He shrugged his shoulders; he muttered, "And yet you will receive my daughter in your household and to the company of your daughters of gentlefolk—you will receive her!"

"You have heard me, Holtham. Leave my house!"

"At my pleasure," he answered, grinning. "You'll hear me first. You do not question my means to pay your fees, extravagant as they are? You do not question that my daughter has been suitably brought up?"

An instant she seemed to waver—to tremble, but to control this terror by her force of will; she said, not faltering: "My rule is rigid and general in its application. I receive the daughters of free colonists, not of emancipists."

He cried out, "Answer me! Do you question the fitness of my child's upbringing?"

"Of what concern can it be to me," she said, "how your child was brought up, Holtham?"

"Listen!" he said, his voice thick and choking as by the struggle of his will with passion. "And let your daughter listen . . . listen! Aught you did against me . . . in the past against me . . . could count nothing to me now. I'd not have approached you, or your daughter here. I'd not have claimed her as my wife!"

Hester uttered a gasping cry. His figure seemed to her to float and flicker before her, and his words to sound faintly and from afar: Mrs. Carrick's face was marble in its composure; her gaze was contemptuous and unfaltering; her jewelled white

hands rested motionless upon the precious laces of her bosom; her lips curved still in a faint smile.

"Nothing to me," he muttered, "any of you—nothing to me! I'm rich. I'm free to live my own life as I will . . . I've the money to live . . . and to learn as I will. To learn of the child . . . you thought . . . kept secret, like the marriage . . . spirited away . . . and placed with any hag who would take her, so's to keep your secret . . . my wife's secret."

Hester rose shuddering, and whispered, "She's . . . she's . . . my child . . . you mean this? You're not . . . not . . . lying . . . lying?"

Mrs. Carrick's voice came thinly: "Are you mad, Hester? Believing this man . . . accepting . . . any child whom this man thinks to palm off on us?"

"Mother, I'm asking him this! I'm asking him, not you! Answer me! Answer me, I say. Is this my daughter?"

He interposed his arm between her and the shrinking, sobbing child. He did not look at Hester; addressing Mrs. Carrick still: "That's all I have to say to you. This is your daughter's child and mine. You know this! And your daughter's child is not fit to be received among your pupils. Not fit! No! That's all! That's why I'm here—to let you and your daughter know, I've found my girl . . . Mrs. Carrick . . . Mrs. Holtham, I bid you a very good day!"

He bowed; he swung about, and with his arm about the child, he strode from the room. Hester, shuddering and gasping, faced her mother.

"Is this true? Is it? My little one didn't die . . . didn't? You've lied to me all these years! You've done me this cruel wrong!"

"Hester! You forget yourself. Go to your room! Pray remember that I have several parents—reputable parents—still to receive!"

CHAPTER III

CHALLENGE—?

MRS. CARRICK'S air of detachment, impatience and contempt stilled Hester's wailing cry and checked hysteric impulse. Hester turned, shuddering, white and wild-eyed; she hurried from the room and along the hall, with blurred, indefinite notion of new arrivals, and of a maid's addressing her: "Oh, please, Miss, will you come to pour tea?—Miss Julia says, please!"—and of answering wearily, "No! Tell Miss Julia I'm tired . . . faint . . . ill!"—and of the girl's round eyes and open mouth; and then of hurrying past her up the stairs.

Hester entered her bedroom, locked the door, and sank upon her knees by the bed—her arms outstretched and her body racked with sobs. Out of sight, out of hearing—beyond the control—of Mrs. Carrick, she contended no longer with emotion. She was whelmed in the waves of memories, memories, and passions resurgent from the grave of years, challenging and assailing; and sense of shame for, and aversion from, John Holtham, lover and husband of those far years—emancipist now, from the chain-gangs of Hobarton, and from the prison at Port Arthur. The coarsely-built and insolent ex-convict of that afternoon—her fear of him, and her shrinking from him—could not dislodge from mind and heart her memories of him as her father's assigned servant

of the Richmond days—lean, brown, strong as steel; his darkly handsome head and his blue eyes —not all her terror of him, degraded as she believed him and malevolent in look and word as in the cunning of his retaliation on Mrs. Carrick and her daughter: in the arrogant demand that Mrs. Carrick receive in her school the daughter of an emancipist, breaking her rigid rule and ruining the prestige of the stately house—yet this child her own granddaughter. So avenging himself, and so destroying!

Hester believed his purpose to be the revelation of the folly and the scandal of long ago—her flight with him and her marriage with him in Launceston. How boldly, madly, he and she had acted, loving so much! How she had persuaded herself and him that his flight from his master would not be punished. Marriage would place him and her beyond her father's reach and revenge. Others had wedded so. Other men, transported to Van Diemen's Land as he, had been accepted by the free colonists—raised from their servitude to equality, and, if not to freedom, to the enjoyment of all its privileges.

She had not estimated the pride and strength of Mrs. Carrick—or her own weakness. She had not dreamed the nature of her parents' action and their revenge. There had been no open scandal—her father's influence with the Colonial Secretary had effected the swift arrest of Holtham; he had been tried for the theft of a gold ring from his master's house, and sentenced to the chain-gang. He had passed, for insubordination and attack on a warder, to Port Arthur.

She told herself—she had repeated to herself so

often that she believed—she would have stood by him. She would have given evidence for him that the ring was her own gift to her husband. She would have defied her parents—but for their strength, their influence over her mind, and her sense of shame and terror, in her separation from him, her return to her home like a prisoner guarded—and but for their assurance, the repeated assurance, that the marriage had been no marriage, and that only by her implicit obedience and silence, could her name be saved. As only by her surrender of her child those months later.

Only! . . .

She had obeyed, fearing and yielding, as all her life, but for that one rebellion, she had obeyed her mother, her power and will; fearing her, and fearing Holtham, and the hour of his release, and his approach to her.

Yet dully inured to thought of Holtham as a lost being held inexorably behind iron bars, chained and degraded—she had ceased to contemplate and fear his release. She had not thought of his ever coming so to the house . . . appearing before her in all the arrogance and show of wealth, yet with the ineffaceable brand of prison on him—the aspect, the shoulders slightly bowed, and the eyes furtive for all their hate and passion.

Yet he had kept silence in the court. He had not involved her name. Fearing? Dear Heaven, what should he have feared more than his punishment—those first years in the chain-gang toiling in the quarries of the Government Paddock? She had heard her father tell that Holtham was working in the quarry—not tell her, but her mother: she had come suddenly and noiselessly

into the room, and had heard the bitter sneering words and laughter. What greater punishment than the prison of Port Arthur? He had kept silent still—had made no mention of her in the trial which had sent him from Hobarton to the Peninsula, the rigour and the terror of that house of the lost. . . .

Why? she asked herself with sick fear now through the turmoil of her thoughts. Why had he kept silence—endured the torment in silence? Only for her . . . for her . . . through that quality in him . . . fineness in him, with which she had credited and invested him so long ago, believing his defence: the sentence at the Old Bailey in London had been too harsh for the mere boyish folly, the weakness, the temptation of the moment bringing years of torment . . . . torment? . . . For love of her—dear Heaven, when had she ceased to believe in his love of her? . . . Suffering in silence, as she had suffered in contemptuous silence? . . . Despising her? . . . Or loving her still? . . .

But having found the child . . . her little child, who they had told her was dead, but whom they must have taken away and given to foster parents—what love should he—should any man—feel toward her? If . . . if the child had been given into cruel hands?

What had he said to Mamma, sneering? He would not have come near them all—would not have claimed his wife, but for the child, spirited away and given to any hag who would take her? Would not have claimed his wife . . .?

She had a shuddering terror of the thought—could he claim her duty to him—life with him?

Could he? . . . Or was this an empty threat only—in his hate of them all, as in his resentment for himself . . . and for the little girl?

The pretty child, with her dark eyes, wide and frightened, and her black curls straying from under her absurdly elaborate bonnet. The thin little body in the muslin frock, over frills—oh, the poor over-dressed little girl! Clinging to Holtham's hand, and shrinking weeping and afraid from Mrs. Carrick. Oh, the poor, pretty thing, in Holtham's charge, after all the motherless years—with—whom had Mamma chosen for the child's foster parents? . . . The sneer . . . the bitter rage in Holtham's voice—surely the child must have been brought up well by any person chosen by Mrs. Carrick—that was the meaning of his taunt!

If this were indeed her child? Hester started up: the waves of emotion seemed to whelm her. Her child—assuredly her child! Else, she could not have watched her with pity . . . sympathy . . . affection through all the cruel interview; else, she could not have recalled, envisaged, now, feature for feature, and traced and known the likeness to herself! Her starved heart could not have beaten so—her defeated mother love have clamoured so, with all this sense of shame for herself, and this bitter resentment and this passionate protest against the restrictive follies and fripperies of the Carrick code—this sacrifice of herself, her little one, on the altar of the Carrick pride and for the preservation of the Carrick name; all this rebellious spirit from her girlhood have risen and impelled her——

Oh, whither impelling her?

To challenge her mother's will—yes! To defy

her, to strike from her own life the shackles of silence, to face the future boldly, not furtively to shrink from the truth . . . ?

The child must be received at Carrick House; she must be her own charge, her darling, her pupil! . . . No! . . . But for the child, for the future of the child, she must leave Carrick House for . . . Holtham.

Coarse, brutal face. Stooping shoulders. Calloused hands and broken nails. Voice thick with hate:

"Else I'd not have claimed my wife . . . else . . ."

She shrank with horror from the thought of him. She faced the mirror, staring dully, unseeing for the while, yet coming to realize the pallor of her face, the distortion, the redness of her eyes, as the disorder of her hair and dress. She stumbled toward the washstand. She must bathe her eyes, and straighten her hair and her dress.

Mamma . . . Julia . . . the maids . . . must not see her like this!

CHAPTER IV

SPIRIT OF REVOLT?

HESTER appeared at the dining-table, very pale, silent, but sedate of dress and demeanour. Mrs. Carrick showed no sign of discomfiture from the encounter with Holtham. Julia was radiant.

The voluminous skirt of her silver-white tarlatan, inset with little roses of silk and velvet; her bodice low from rose-white shoulders; the drops of her ear-rings and her necklace of crystal, her fair hair worn in ringlets without ribbon or artificial flowers—were so many tributes to Mr. Henry Marley; Julia was to accompany him to the concert in the Mechanics Institute that evening at which His Excellency and Lady Denison would be present. Hester, listening dully, gathered that Mr. Marley might be expected early at the house. His sisters, Mrs. Pleydell and her daughters would attend the concert, and preserve the proprieties for Julia. Mrs. Carrick had declined the invitation to chaperon her daughter.

From Julia's gaiety and good-humour Hester knew that her mother had not told her of Holtham's visit or the shadow lowering over the credit of Carrick House and even Julia's happiness with Marley: the gentleman's attitude toward emancipists was as clearly defined as his social position. Shrinking from, yet knowing the imminence of, conflict with her mother, Hester was glad of the

diversion lent by Julia and her absorption in the theme of Henry Marley and of the concert. Mrs. Carrick appeared politely, if satirically, interested in Julia's happiness; Hester was subdued and silent as from the habit of years—a colourless personality in the light of her mother's stately beauty and of her sister's good looks and elegance. She believed that Mrs. Carrick, as she, avoided, yet knew the inevitability of, the clash of wills concerning Holtham and the child.

Marley, darkly handsome, correct in blackness of broadcloth and silk, and in whiteness of linen, was ushered into the parlour while they sat with their tea-cups—Mrs. Carrick seated in her armchair by the hearth, with a shawl about her shoulders against the coolness of the sea breeze; Julia seated by the french-window—exquisite in the softness of twilight; Hester facing her from the shadow of the curtains. Marley, then, duly deferential to Mrs. Carrick and complimentary to Julia. His bow and words to Hester were stiff and formal; she was aware of his estimate of her unimportance—she had resented the insolent patronage of his sister during the attendance of her two girls at the school. She was troubled instantly by his announcement: "I'm sorry that my sister has entrusted me with her apologies and regrets, Mrs. Carrick. She is not well enough to go to the concert—she has a severe headache. She is staying at home with the girls."

"How unfortunate!" Mrs. Carrick offered sympathy, with a swift glance at Hester. "Then——?"

"Perhaps, Mrs. Carrick, you'll be good enough to reconsider your refusal to go with us," he suggested.

She shook her head: "I fear not, thank you, Mr. Marley. I am very tired, and I have work still to do in my study. But Hester will be delighted."

Hester said with instant decision, "No, thank you, Mamma."

"I beg your pardon, Hester?" Mrs. Carrick appeared not to have heard distinctly. "I am sure that Hester will be glad to go with you and her sister, Mr. Marley. It will be a delightful entertainment to her."

"If you'll be so kind, Miss Carrick," Marley said with a smile and bow towards Hester.

Julia, rising, said sharply, "To be sure, Mr. Marley! . . . Hester will be delighted to go . . . You will be, won't you, my love?"—with a swift nod and significant glance at Hester's gown—she had made no change from the checked foulard.

Hester trembled, but did not stir from her chair. She said calmly, "I'm sorry, Julia, of course, but I can't go with you. It is good of you, Mr. Marley—" with a tinge of satire—"to offer me the ticket which your sister is unable to use. But like her, I have a headache!"

"But . . . but . . . you didn't mention a headache!" Julia protested, colouring and frowning.

"No! I seldom mention illness do I, Julia?" Hester said faintly, conscious of Mrs. Carrick's angry eyes. "But I have been much distressed to-day, as Mamma may care to tell you."

Mrs. Carrick intervened hastily. "I fear that this midsummer weather tires us all, Mr. Marley—my daughter, as your sister. But in Hester's

indisposition, I shall be happy to go with you and Julia!"—rising from her chair, and hesitant a moment, on the strict observance of the proprieties, yet on the possibility of new impoliteness from Hester, if left with Julia and Marley as convention demanded: "I shall be only a moment or two getting ready. Will you excuse me, please? Pray, give me your arm, Hester. I find the stairs rather steep"—smiling, taking Hester's arm, and moving to the door, and nodding with a word of thanks, as Marley opened the door.

She did not relinquish her hold on her daughter's arm; she did not speak till they had crossed the hall, and were climbing the stairs. She said then, quietly and kindly, "You're finding the strain of the afternoon too much for you, Hester. It is unlike you to be discourteous, ill-bred, toward a visitor."

Hester did not trust herself to answer.

"Don't you understand, child, the strain on me?" Mrs. Carrick said. "Don't you, Hester? Why don't you answer?"

Hester whispered, "What should I answer, Mother?" her repression matching Mrs. Carrick's repression. "Do you expect me not to be distressed and shaken by my husband's visit with . . . with my child? Do you?"

"I expect you to assist me, Hester, in preventing open scandal!" Mrs. Carrick said. "I expect you to face this fellow boldly and repel his insolence and defeat his design to avenge himself on us all, knowing that if he be made to understand that any injury to us will recoil upon himself, he will be afraid and will trouble us no more. I expect you to set him at defiance as I do, and to go about

your duties, and to face our world bravely, as I do. Nay, the duty is yours, not mine, to quell this scandal. I am known so well—my standards and my way of living are known so well—and esteemed, Hester, that not I, but you, will suffer; not I, but you, will be ostracized, if this be known!"

"Can life hurt me more," Hester said, "than life has hurt me? Can I be more unhappy than I have been all these years?"

"You know this, Hester!"

"I only know that always in this house, always from that time, you have disliked me and despised me, Mother. I know that Julia and all the girls here—the very maids—take pattern by you at times, and treat me with contempt and sneers and laughter, or at best with pity . . . pity. Despising me, as you despise me, Mother; yet not as I despise myself."

"Remembering your folly, Hester!" Mrs. Carrick murmured, halting by her door, and drawing her hand from her daughter's arm. "Remembering?"

"No! For enduring!"

"Hester, I advise you to go to your room and rest, while Julia and I are out this evening. You will have time to reflect, and to understand the wisdom of obedience. I saved your name from scandal years ago. Is your name nothing to you? I shall save your name still, by setting this fellow at defiance, or, if need be, by a word to Sir William Denison . . . This man Holtham values his hard-won liberty more than his thought to injure me—and you, I fancy!"

Hester said darkly, regarding her mother, "He does not wish to hurt me!"

"How can you say this, Hester, after to-day?"

"I know this, Mother. He wouldn't have come to the house only to avenge himself on you—though he had cause—or yet to show his power of injuring you. He came here so that I might know that he had not changed toward me. So that I might judge you . . . and your cruelty . . . to my own child!"

"Hester, I'll not bear such insolence!" Mrs. Carrick breathed.

"I speak the truth, Mother," Hester said desperately. "Knowing him so well and understanding him!"

"This creature from Port Arthur and the chain-gangs!"

"Yet my husband, Mother, loving me!"

Mrs. Carrick, leaning forward, her face as marble in its pallor and rigidity, asked sneering, "Will you go to your lover . . . this convict? Is this your thought, Hester? . . . Is this your thought?"

"Mother, if I forgave . . . all the hurt you have done to my husband . . . and my child . . . and me," Hester said fiercely, "I'd not forget this."

"Hester, you delay me with your hysterical folly. I must not keep Julia and Mr. Marley waiting too long. Do you expect Mr. Marley and his family to welcome an alliance with your sister, if ever this be known? Do you wish to destroy your sister's happiness, as you destroyed your father's happiness and mine?"

CHAPTER V

THE EMANCIPIST

THE house stood to the west of the New town Road—a high pile of yellow stone, slate-roofed—superior in dignity to its new master, set in a deep, stone-walled garden, and furnished with the luxury of its East India founder and the elegance of his wife. Light from iron lanterns played down the high flight of steps to the garden dreaming in moonlight. Stirred by the sea-breeze the heavy curtains swayed and divided before the open windows of the dining-room, and pale fluttering light showed Holtham and his lawyer, James Lade, at table—though the cloth had been drawn. The lamp suspended by brass chains from the ceiling of the dining-room was not lit. The lights of the candles in the branching silver sticks waved in the draught, flickering on the pale and lean, grey-haired, and spectacled Lade, his rusty black, and the whiteness of his linen, and on Holtham's dark and sunburnt face, frowning black brows, and deep-set blue eyes. The red and the white fire of his rings emphasized the coarseness of his hand touching the stem of his glass. For the summer warmth of the evening he wore a black velvet jacket over a silken shirt; his black cravat was drawn through a gold ring. His hair, coarsened by prison cropping, was smooth with oil; his lips and chin blue-black from the razor, but his line of whisker trim. The smoke

of his cigar rose in a blue cloud ; Mr. Lade coughed, and held his handkerchief to his nose. Holtham noticed that his guest's glass was empty.

"The port's by you, sir."

"Thank you—no ! You don't drink wine, I notice, Holtham."

He laughed : "Mr. Lade, if you'd lost so much of your life as I have—so many years of enjoyment—self-indulgence you'd say—you'd need a stronger drink than port—though my man tells me this is a good vintage. You'd drink brandy as I do. Crowding and compressing sensations into the shred of life left."

"Yes, but, quite possibly, missing your aim, Holtham," the lawyer said, watching with cold disfavour his host's flushed face, and the trembling of his hands, as he half-filled his glass with brandy, and in pouring water from the crystal jug, splashed the table.

"How do you mean, Mr. Lade ? Missing my aim ?"

"The finer shades of enjoyment—the niceties. The majority of us enjoys drinking, Holtham, but few men really enjoy getting drunk."

"You're frank, Mr. Lade !" Holtham growled, scowling.

"I am ! You invited frankness of me in all the relations of my firm with you, sir. I say that you drink too much brandy—you're too often drunk. And I need hardly warn you that you run a risk of—well, of exchanging all this comfort for a sphere cruelly familiar to you."

"I've served my term," the emancipist muttered thickly. "I hold my conditional pardon. I'm free to live as I like in the Colony."

"Hardly that, I think, my good sir," Lade said, tapping his fingers on the table. "You should know that our ordinary social law—social discipline—would fall more heavily on you than on—well, the ordinary member of our community . . . Frankly, I think you were drunk when you visited Mrs. Carrick at her school this afternoon."

"I wasn't drunk, Mr. Lade!" Holtham retorted, his eyes glinting. "I'd drunk very little—for me. I wanted my head clear . . . You've not understood . . . why I went there."

"I assume to ask Mrs. Carrick to receive this child—your daughter you tell me—as a pupil. You've assured me of this. And when she rejected the child—as, naturally, she would—you appear to have lost your temper, and risked a charge of grossly offensive behaviour to this lady. She is influential; she is respected. If she'd cared to send for a constable and have you arrested, her evidence at the court would have sent you back to Port Arthur. Transportation is ending, but the prisons still stand, Holtham."

Holtham emptied his glass, and chuckled: "But she would not, Mr. Lade!"

"Surely experience should have taught you otherwise, Mr. Holtham!"

"What do you mean?"

Lade shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly, you've forgotten," he said dryly, "that you told me that Henry Carrick was your master before your—ah—more unfortunate experience."

"You mean I was drunk when I spoke to you," Holtham laughed. "Perhaps! But I'm not drunk now, Mr. Lade—far from it. And I was not drunk when I called on this woman. She could

not report me to the police. Just as she'll not persist in her refusal to receive my daughter—she cannot; she dare not, Mr. Lade!"

"H'm!" Lade eyed him reflectively. "Is this a safe surmise, Holtham—or a particularly generous one? . . . Whatever the grudge you bear against this lady."

Holtham's brows were knitted; his eyes averted from Lade; he sat silent, seeming absorbed in dark and malevolent thought.

Lade proceeded coolly, "Probably, Holtham, you regard me as speaking for the class of colonists for whom I am accustomed to act. Believe me that I speak to you in all sincerity—as your adviser, and as understanding your tragedy—society's bitter punishment of your folly of long ago, and the irony of your enrichment—at the very close of the punishment which excludes you still—in a sense excludes you—from the class to whom—by birth and education—you belong. As I interpret my duties to you, I'm bound to present the case clearly and impartially to you. Here are you—an emancipist—holding a pardon which shuts you out of England——"

He interrupted with a savage oath: "England! Do you imagine I'd think ever to return to England?"

Lade continued impassively, as though he had not heard him, "But allowing you within this Colony the full enjoyment of your fortune—ownership of house and land—engagement in trade or industry—this I've commended to you to occupy your time. Giving you the opportunity, if you will, of proving by honesty and fair dealing—and sobriety—the completeness of your reformation,

and—for in years you are a young man still—the scope to define and build a new life. But, Holtham, through drunkenness and revengeful folly, you may throw all this away!"

"Have I shown any intention of doing so?" Holtham sneered.

"Certainly—every probability," Lade told him unruffled, "by your actions; particularly by your behaviour toward this lady, Mrs. Carrick!"

"That's enough, Lade!" Holtham muttered thickly. "No! Sit down! No need to be offended—no need to think of stalking out of the house, feeling yourself insulted. I heed you, sir, I heed you. I welcome your candour. It accords with our contract, man! The fault's mine, but you don't understand this visit to Mrs. Carrick—I've not told you the reason. You'd better hear it. . . . I suppose you'd better hear it. I should have trusted you and told you."

"I see no cause for reservations with your lawyer, Holtham," Lade said dryly.

Holtham laughed grimly: "Cause! . . . If I belonged still to the class you've stressed on me, reminding me what I am . . . what I am now!—I'd not confide even in you, even in my lawyer. If my memory serves me—I should not. . . . But I've no need to be so delicate!"

"The point escapes me, Holtham."

"Does it?" he jeered. "Perhaps my memory fails me, Mr. Lade, after so many years of the chain-gang and Port Arthur. My thought is of a code I followed long ago. Not to bring any woman's good name into question or discussion. Not to disclose any secret knowledge affecting her. Drunk or sober, not to tell."

The lawyer watched him narrowly: "And not to threaten a woman as you appear to have threatened Mrs. Carrick this afternoon!" he said coolly.

Holtham nodded. "Yet always to defend one's wife or child," he retorted, "against the world, Lade."

"It is the code still, Holtham."

"Lade," Holtham said, leaning forward in his chair, "do you think, seriously, I'd have gone to this woman's house with my little girl—exposed the poor brat to her hateful insolence, and let her turn her from her door, but for another motive than that my girl should mix with the daughters of gentlefolk—they're the woman's claim and words—'daughters of gentlefolk!'—do you think I'd have gone swaggering into the house, being what I am, an emancipist?"

"Is it necessary to noise your past abroad always, Holtham?" Lade interrupted with distaste.

"No. Though I'm determined on this, Lade, through all my life in Hobarton—not to avoid the facts. Rich as I am—able to buy my way—not! You're right, Lade, I'd not have done this; the woman and her accursed school would have been nothing to me. All the hurt she and her husband did me . . . all the years in the chain-gang and the Port—through them—would have been nothing—nothing at all. Who do you think my girl is, Lade? Why do you think I directed inquiry among the Carrick servants and search for the child? Because one of the Carrick women servants—she and her husband keep the 'Black Snake' public-house—gave me the word, soon as I'd served my term, that there was a child born

the year after I was sent to the chain-gang, and the child, born in wedlock, oh, ay!—had been hid away, like any base born brat—hid away by Mrs. Carrick. My girl's her granddaughter, Lade. No, I'm not drunk. You needn't look at me in that way . . . her daughter Hester is my wife . . . lawfully wedded wife, she is. She and I ran off together—married we were in Launceston—in our right names."

"Do you mean to tell me that any clergyman—— ?"

He interrupted in a savage tone: "Lade, you're speaking of my wife. The social code again. I tell you—yes, I tell you this. What lies I told the old parson don't matter. The guineas spoke for me . . . No! That's not fair. I think he understood and pitied, knowing how much we were in love, and judging better the wedding than—! Lade, do you see, do you understand, what they've made me? Talking so? Jeering . . . at her. My wife! You're doubting me still, aren't you?"

Lade hesitated: "No. But you amaze me, naturally."

"Lade," Holtham said, "but for the treatment of the little girl, I'd not have approached Mrs. Carrick and her daughter, even though the parents gaoled me on a lie—a stolen ring—to separate me from her; even though they sent me on the way down to Hell—the Port—the Port! Being no more than a lad, and loving . . . loving . . . worshipping . . . her . . . as an angel of light . . . yes, worshipping! She could love me well enough to run away with me and marry me, though I was her father's assigned servant. She could! But she wasn't strong enough—she was too much

afraid of them—to challenge their perjury, and tell the court the ring was her gift . . . her pledge to me."

"Holtham, if this be true," Lade said, "why did you not speak to the court and tell the truth?"

He cried out with a roar of laughter. "The code, Lade. The code, and a woman's name . . . her name."

"Your wife should have been loyal to you. She should have defied her parents. She should have given evidence and cleared you."

"The poor, pretty, shrinking creature," Holtham said, his laughter dying. "How should she dare oppose them?"

"She dared to marry you, Holtham."

"She dared to marry me secretly. She ran away from them to marry me, Lade. Lade, believe this of me, that there wasn't any thought, calculation of profit on my part, other than my love of her, and honour of her. Believe this of me—then, as I was then—whatever I am now."

"But now, Holtham, now?" the lawyer said earnestly. "You care for her still. You want her still. If she cares for you still, she will return to you."

With livid look, with jewelled fingers pointing and twisting, he muttered, "No. If she would, I'd not have her by me now."

"And yet you went to her mother's house to-day, thinking to see her," Lade said. "That was your true reason, Holtham. I know this. You can't deceive me, if you deceive yourself."

Holtham's clenched hand crashed down upon the table. "No. She let the child be given by her parents into hateful, cruel keeping. She let the

child suffer, suffer, as no little child should suffer. For her name—the Carrick name. No. Lade, I wanted her and the mother to see the little girl with me, happy and smartly dressed. I wanted 'em to know the Carrick name was at my mercy, that was all."

"But, Holtham, your memory of this poor lady—as my knowledge of her—is of a gentle, shrinking creature, ignored, over-worked, pushed into the background always for the younger sister, Julia. A victim I interpret her in the light of your story to me, to her mother's arrogance—and to you."

"To me? What do you mean, Lade? What am I to her now?"

"I've told you, surely," the lawyer said deliberately. "Clearly, she lives a miserable life under the shadow of the old disgrace—shame, as her mother regards her association with you." Earnestly then, and leaning forward: "Holtham, you're likely in your present course of dissipation to wreck the years of your freedom and your fortune, as you wrecked your youth by yielding to folly and temptation."

"I lead my own life as I will, I tell you, Lade."

"As you will," Lade nodded. "But at least inflict no new injury on two unhappy beings."

"Whom do you mean? The Carrick woman and her daughter?"

"No. Your child, Holtham—by a degradation which will send you back to Port Arthur, and leave her again to the mercy of the world. And to your wife, Holtham, whom you love still."

"I tell you, Lade——"

"I say—whom you love still. Her place is with you and her child, Holtham. She should return

to you. You should entreat her to return to you."

"Entreat her ? Hating her !"

"Holtham, you could wreak no greater vengeance on Mrs. Carrick than by inducing her daughter to proclaim herself your wife and mother of your child. But I estimate you more accurately than you interpret yourself to me. The reason of revenge would not weigh with you."

"What else ?" Holtham muttered, chin sunken to his chest, and eyes obscured by the compression of his brows.

"The code you've recalled, Holtham," Lade said quietly. "Merely the code."

Holtham did not speak. His hands fumbled for bottle and glass.

CHAPTER VI

THE PILLARS OF THE TEMPLE

THE perfumed coolness of the summer night, in contrast with the smoke and heat of the dining-room, the play of the sea breeze on brows fevered from brandy, and dull desire for clearness of mind to consider Lade's advice of re-union with Hester, held the emancipist in the open air, after the lawyer had taken leave. Holtham had accompanied Lade to the gate, having received with a sardonic grin Lade's refusal of his offer to have him driven home, on the assumption that the lawyer was averse from possible recognition in such a client's carriage on this moonlit night.

The moon was high and full, and glorified the night. Illumination and loveliness of form, definite and suggested, through the arched gateway high above the road, the few pale lamps from doorways and windows, the clouded blur of dwellings, gardens, foliage, the tree-crowned Government Paddock to the east, flickered and quivered to Holtham's eyes, as light and shape seen through wind-tossed branches. In the night air his head swam from the fumes of brandy. He drew back from the gate, and staggered slowly up the flagged path among shrubs and flowers. An ecstasy of perfumes was blown about him; an ecstasy of blossoms waved and fluttered in the sweet breeze

from the sea. He heard afar—from one of the taverns down the New town Road—voices roaring a chorus, and he felt the impulse to go down thither, and to find among its roisterers fit company for a night of drunkenness, and to win forgetfullness from cruel and crowding thoughts of loss, of waste, and of wrong irreparable, but for the memory of Lade's words—suggestion—of life ahead, of solace, peace and honour won from wreckage, and for Hester, and the little girl, he checked the impulse. The night was young, surely: the public-houses were not closed; it was not ten o'clock.

He had turned back toward the gate. He turned again. He was stumbling up the steps to the porch, when he heard the voices of the bells, the beauty of the bells attuned to the silver beauty of the night, and to the sighing of the breeze through the pine trees of his garden. Yet his mind, now flickering as to extinction of thought, and now flaming to madness, to a yet more dreadful extinction of reason, was shut from sense of delight in beauty. Beauty of sound, this exquisite play of light and shadow, and this dance of blossoms and moonbeams, and all these swinging censers, all these perfumes rising from the garden to the summer glory of the night, like incense smoking to the Lord, reeled in a sickly play of impressions toward his sodden brain, yet were excluded and repelled.

The chiming of the bells reached his mind, but from silver beauty was transmuted in its crucible to base metallic sounds.

The bells, ringing in practice from Holy Trinity upon the hill, sounded to him not bells, but the

clangour of pick-axes, hammers and chisels on stone, and the clanking of irons. He swung about; he reeled and would have fallen in the porch, but he gripped the high pillar to his right, and supported himself against the stone, and stared out on the chaotic night.

Ever the bells were chiming, chiming. Ever the hammers rang, the chisels clinked, and the chains clanked. Ever to his eyes light and darkness contended, vision with imagination, and realities of beauty with memories hateful and obscene.

The pine trees between him and the distant hill crowned with the new church of Holy Trinity, his inability to focus sight or to move from the obstructing, yet supporting pillar, and the buildings interposed, excluded from his eyes the belfry high above the city, and the pointing pinnacles, yet he envisaged a distortion of the church, the belfry, as he had seen Trinity daily from a little distance, riding or driving by Elizabeth Street to or from the city itself, since his release. He had surveyed the church with hostile eyes, having the thought, the memory, of the quarries in the Government Paddock, above the river, whence the golden stone for the high towered house rising to the state of the Governor, and the House to the glory of God, was cut.

The terraced face of cliff above him; the din of pick-axes, hammers, chisels; the sick heat; the swarming flies; the straining of tormented bodies clad in blue-grey, black and canary yellow; the swinging arms—the overseers, the guards; their measured pacing to and fro; the rumbling of the carts.

And he had now the memory of the months of servitude in the chain-gang and his revolt, and his trial, and the closing of the prison gates of Port Arthur upon him, as a steel trap upon a tortured beast . . . Swinging hammers; hammers clanging on stone. Bodies straining to the loads of stone piled on the carts; droning of prison chaplain's voice, droning, droning: "I have surely built Thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever."

And for his laughter in the prison chapel the darkness of the soundless, solitary cell; blackness, blackness, all the eternity of blackness. And his own mocking laughter against life and faith, mockery of Heaven and men, flung back upon him; and in that silence as of the inner sepulchre, seeming to him soundless even to his own ears and mind. Silence . . . silence . . . the infinite torment of the silence. The thought that out of this pit of silence of the prison neither Heaven nor man could hear his defiance!

The bells of Trinity chimed silver through the silver night.

The clangour from the quarries all the years since sounded through his brain, but with the blowing of the cold breeze on his brows, and the fever of his drunken bout burning down, now the music of the bells was interwoven with the clangour of the hammers and the clanking from the chain-gang, and the rattling of the wheels, like light struggling through darkness.

The bells of Holy Trinity rang high in a glory of sound. His arms encircled, his hands gripped,

the pillar of the porch; his muscles strained. He had a wild thought that, as Samson, he would pull down the pillars of the house, destroy himself, and all that were in the house; but the house was the House of God.

The bells . . . the triumphant bells!

CHAPTER VII

"HAD WE NEVER MET!"

THE bells of Trinity were silent.

Leaning now against the pillar, his arms sunken to his side, the paroxysm ended and his brain clearing, he faced the ever-freshening breeze from the sea, welcoming its coolness upon his brow.

The sudden clearing of his brain, as by an awakening out of drunken sleep, was no new experience to him during the intemperate months of freedom and fortune—the sudden blackening of reason, and period of oblivion of thought or word or action. Now, he believed only that he had dozed, while leaning against the pillar, after taking leave of Lade. Owing to his bodily strength, increased rather than impaired through the years of penal servitude, he was conscious of no sickness or weakness from the hours of drinking. His hands were steady and his eyes were clearing. Thirst consumed him.

Yet with a sense of the beneficent coolness, and for dull perception of the beauty of the night, and the clouding flowers colourless in moonlight, and the richness of their perfume, and for the knowledge of his freedom and his pleasure in his possession of this East India officer's stately dwelling and spacious gardens, he did not turn yet into the house, resisting the impulse to go back to the dining-table and the brandy bottle.

He wondered to hear the click and creak of the gate. His visitors were few. He assumed that one of the servants was returning to the house. He was surprised that the tall, veiled figure did not pass about the house, but came slowly to the steps. He recognized her, as she climbed the steps, with her veil and shawl fluttering in the breeze, and he called her name hoarsely—"Hester!"—though recoiling from her. Bitter and sardonic thought of her was countered instantly by emotion. He checked emotion, and stepping forward, he faced her as she stood motionless upon the step below him. He muttered thickly, "Well? What is it? What do you want here?"

She whispered, leaning forward, "I must see you and speak to you, but not here, where anyone may see us and hear us."

"You're afraid of scandal, is that it?" he sneered. "You want to talk to me, but not be heard or seen, being Miss Carrick, of Carrick House still."

She whispered still, with show of terror now, "Hush, pray hush. Don't use my name. Let me go into the house with you, to any room, where I'll not be seen—heard—recognized."

"Say what you have to say—here!"

She said, in a tone of affront and pride, "I'll go at once, then," and she turned, and would have gone down the steps. He muttered instantly and hoarsely, "No, stay. There's the study. Farnham's study, not mine. You can say there what you have to say."

Hesitant, but turning again toward him, she said, "What of your servants?"

"They'll not dare come nigh till I ring," he assured her, laughing thickly. "No. You'll be

safe." And at her nod, he was impelled, by habit of long ago in London, to offer his arm. She did not accept his offer, but she moved beside him slowly into the lamp-lit hall. He noted grimly the motion of her hands to ensure the veiling of her face, and the muffling of her violet silken shawl about her throat. He led her along the hall, opened a door to the right, and stood aside that she might enter the East Indian's study; he was accustomed to spend his evenings in the book-lined room, with its glass cases, its writing-table, its furniture of cedar and horsehair. A lamp was burning low on the table; bottle, water jug, and glass were set on a tray.

He closed and locked the door; pushed forward an arm-chair by the table, and said in a low, hard tone, "Sit down. No one'll see or hear. I'll turn up the lamp."

With the white light illumining the room, her drooping figure and her bowed head, he was tempted to fill his glass, and drink, but he restrained himself, in spite of the fever of his thirst. He walked to the black-screened hearth, and, with the light clear on his besotted face, he stood looking down at her. He asked, "What do you want to say to me?"

She did not raise her veil; she did not lift her head; she said in slow and leaden tone, "I was alone to-night. I could leave my mother's house, with no one seeing . . . knowing. They told me—the servants—of your living here. I did not know that you were free till this afternoon. I did not know even that you lived."

"And did not care," he jeered.

"I cared," she answered simply. "Yes, I cared."

"Hoping that I was dead, or that I'd never be freed, to rise like a ghost at your feast of life."

She laughed a bitter laugh. Swiftly she raised her veil, so that the white light struck cruelly upon her pallor, her thin cheeks, and her sombre eyes. "My feast of life!" she said. "Did I seem to you, when you came so boldly to my mother's house this afternoon, to be a happy woman, feasting on life? Do I seem happy now?" And at the aversion on his face from her and his sullen silence, her voice rose in trembling protest, "Do you credit me with so little feeling, remembering, long ago, and my love for you, and my faith in you? Did I not prove my love so well . . . that . . . being even what you are, you should hesitate to taunt me now?"

He did not look at her; he said harshly and remotely, "Why do you come to see me? Did your mother send you, to intercede with me, and beg me to keep silence? So's gentlefolk would send their daughters to her school still?"

"No."

"But she asked silence. She threatened she could send me back to the hell from which time . . . eternity . . . has lifted me. She threatened this, fearing me. Why do you come here?"

She said as bitterly, "Why did you come to my mother's house this afternoon?"

He answered, with a snarl of laughter, "Why? As parent or guardian! Was I not free to go to the school? Am I not free to go whither I will in the Colony?"

"Oh, answer me!" she said. "What was your reason? Hate of us? Hate of me? Simply to taunt us?"

"Yes, to taunt."

"I have a different thought of you."

"You do not know me."

"But I remember——"

"I am not what I was," he said, with livid look, and beat of his clenched fist upon the air. "I have been through an age of torment. I have been through a hell, and I have risen . . . recreated!"

She said, her head bowed sorrowfully and her voice tremulous, "Yet answer me, answer me! Why did you come to the house this afternoon? Why did you bring the child?"

He did not speak; his eyes were bent on the bottle and the glass, and his fingers stretched toward them, but, at the slow sorrow of her tone, he contended with the longing for the brandy, and with the impulse to inflict insult on her, by his very gesture, the pointing of his fingers toward the bottle.

"Was there no other motive than challenge, insolence, hate, toward my mother and me?" she said. "Did you come only to show yourself to her, rich and free and arrogant? Oh, answer me. Did you come only demanding admission for the poor child to the school, so that we might know that you had found her, and for revenge on us . . . for your own sufferings, and for the child's sufferings, if she be your child and mine?"

He muttered then, "Do you doubt this is your child and mine?"

"My mind rejects the thought," she said, "yet my heart tells me that she is our child."

"And you abandoned her," he sneered, turning toward her, eyes ablaze. "You let her be given to a wretched woman, not caring what was the

child's fate . . . the cruelty to her, cruelty under the guise of piety and strict upbringing, such cruelty as, had she been in the prisons with me, she'd not have undergone! And you cared nothing, nothing, if only your name, the Carrick name, might be saved, and you not be disgraced!"

She cried out, starting up, her hands plucking at the silken shawl as though to rend it, "That is not true! I did not know. They told me she was dead. I would have sought for her; I would have cared for her."

"No—only for your name."

"Again I say it is not true. And you . . . and you . . . of all men, you should know it is not true! What was my name to me, measured against my love for you? Why, loving you . . . you, a convict, I could wed you for my love of you . . . my name was nothing."

"Yes, and betray me for your name."

"No. I say no! For weakness, and for sickness, and for fear of them," she said, her passion dying; her agitation told no longer in the current of her words, but only in the plucking, plucking still of her fingers at the silken shawl. "When we were parted . . . parted . . . and you were dragged away to your prison—back to your prison——"

"And punished for the theft of your gift to me!"

"When my heart seemed broken, and my spirit broken, broken, and all my weakness, all my fear of them, Father and Mother, all the influence of the years of fear were upon me, and I was kept like a prisoner in the Richmond house, how should I have intervened and helped you, and given evidence for you? I think when my heart broke, my reason wandered. I think, having no memory

of those months, no clear memory, but only the thought of terror and sickness, and of dull sorrow, I was not sane. And after my child was born, I was not sane. I only thought, I only prayed to die. I can't remember anything except my prayers to die, and my blind, helpless grief for you. And they told me that we were not wed—you'd tricked me, and I and the child, because of you, were shameful. And all my duty, all my hope, they told me . . . I think, I do not know . . . lay in my silence; secrecy only could undo my sin, my shame, and giving up the child. And at last they told me that the child was dead."

"Though surely, freely, willingly you had given up your child."

Her bitter laughter struck across his words. "Of my free will! Dear God, what will had I?"

He was silent; leaning forward swiftly, she whispered, "But—but—the little girl you brought to the school to-day, she is my child, I know this! Where is she? Let me see her."

He cried out, with snarl of voice, and menace of clenched hands, "No. No. You'll not see her!"—and with swift change from rage to sneer—"What of your good name? What of scandal for Carrick House? What if my servants, the lags, my servants, see you, and know you?"

She bowed her head, and covered her eyes with her hands.

He went on bitterly, "Is that why you're here? To see the child your mother wouldn't admit to her school because she's a convict's daughter, though her own granddaughter—is that all?"

She said in muffled tones, "I'll answer this, if you'll answer me."

"What have I to answer?"

"Why did you come to the school to-day?"

He did not speak, she raised her head, and with tearful eyes she gazed intently at him, "Answer me, please. Why did you come to the school to-day? Why did you? You didn't think . . . you didn't wish, that the poor child be received among the girls of Carrick House. You know you didn't wish or think that. Answer me, please!"

He drew back; his chin was sunken on his breast; the dark compression of his brows hid his eyes from her.

Trembling, she persisted, "Was it the real reason . . . that you wanted me to know all, wanted me to see you, and my little girl? And you wanted to see me?"

With a roar of laughter, he cried out, "Why should I want to see you or to make you know?"

She said deliberately, "Caring for me still, and hoping I cared still. That was the real reason."

"No." His voice snarled and jeered still. "No. This was the reason . . . the reason—" his fingers closing upon bottle and glass. "This! Just this! I was drunk!"

He poured the spirit into the glass, and raised it to his lips, and drank. She drew her veil about her face, and turned to the door. With the instant heat of the brandy inflaming him, he cried out, "But, by God, drunk or sober, I'll have my will! I'll have my girl received among the daughters of gentlefolk."

"It is impossible," she whispered faintly.

"Why?"

"It is the rule of Carrick House. Admission of

the child, known as your daughter, would ruin the school."

"Yet your daughter. Your daughter."

She said, with a choking sob, "I'll go, please. Will you unlock the door for me?"

He set down the empty glass; he staggered toward the door, and unlocked it. With a livid look at her, he muttered, "Why did you come here to me, Hester?"

Proudly and coldly, she said, "I shall answer that when you tell me really why you came to the school this afternoon."

Opening the door, and standing aside, he said, "I've given you my answer."

She passed by him in silence.

CHAPTER VIII

CONTRAST OF CARRICK HOUSE

THE walk from Holtham's to Carrick House was short, yet, at this hour of the night, not without its terror to Hester: malefactors might lurk in the shadows of the New town Road; she might be followed by sneaking rascals from the main road to the loneliness of the lanes toward the school. Yet she rejected coldly Holtham's clumsy proffer of escort.

As she hurried from the gateway, and crossed the New town Road, she judged by the silence from the taverns that the hour was after ten o'clock. She avoided nervously a noisy group from one of these taverns; in the moonlight she hurried into the lane, which would bring her above Argyle Street to the gate of Carrick House. She grew afraid of the shadows in the overgrown lane. She believed that she was followed, hearing or imagining the dull tramp of feet after her. She ran down the lane, and not till she had reached the moonlit road, did she dare turn her head.

She saw Holtham, then, bare-headed and reeling slightly, and she had a thought of his height and bulk and strength, and she trembled with pitiful understanding that he had followed her only for her own security. He halted at the intersection of the lane. She climbed the hill, and looking back, ere she turned aside to the stone gateway of Carrick House, she saw him waiting still.

She repressed the thought, the fluttering hope, the fear, that he had come to the house that afternoon only with the idea of seeing her, and of the inevitable appeal to her of the little girl. Even though in the bitter scene between them that night, he had refused to allow her to see the child—if she were in his house ?

Despite her absorption in the purpose of her visit, she had taken heed of the profusion of scented blossoms in Holtham's garden. She had heard, or imagined, the silver tinkle of a fountain, and had believed it playing white and glittering in the moonlight, and its spray blown by the breeze like dew upon moss roses, and stocks, and mignonette. She was moved, by her excitement, to laughter, nigh hysteria, by the contrast, on passing noiselessly through the gateway into the garden of Carrick House. Such beauty as it owned, the moonlight found, but loveliness lay in bluish light and in faint shadow, not in this close-cropped cypress hedge against the spike-crowned, brick wall, or in the thin, tight-waisted, full-skirted distortions of shrubs and trees, as though the refining and restricting spirit of Mrs. Carrick were symbolized, and natural beauty forced into a well-bred and fashionable rigidity.

Oh, the hideous red-gravelled drive ! Oh, the poor, thin, shaven lawn, with all the lifeless parade of tight-waisted, full-skirted, and stiff-necked trees and shrubs, like monuments to Mamma's scholastic method ! Oh, the narrow, box-bordered flower-beds, below the windows and against the side walls ! Why, Hester told herself, the poor dears did not dare to wear bright colours or to use scent !

But her laughter died, and her fear was swift, as she saw the full illumination of the parlour window, and heard a murmur of voices from within; oh, surely, Mamma couldn't have returned so soon? Surely it was not so much later than she had thought, the concert couldn't be ended yet?

Whatever would Mamma think and say? That Hester should have dared, have been so brazen, as to go out at night, without escort! What should she do?

Though, what did it matter after all? What could matter anything Mamma might say? Now that . . . well, now that life was different, or must be . . . must be . . . very soon. She checked instantly the thought of Holtham and the child, the wistful, fluttering regret: that she hadn't even asked the little girl's name. Head high, veil thrown back, Hester mounted the low steps, and entered the house.

She was relieved to find that Mamma was not at home, after all; that only a visitor or visitors were in the parlour, so late in the evening, too.

She paused in the hall by the half-open door, and she met the maid coming from the parlour, and she asked softly, "Who is it, Janet?"

"It's Mr. Guard, Miss, please. And he's been waiting a long while. I told him Missus and Miss Julia was out at the concert, but I didn't know where you was, Miss. He'd just rung the bell to tell me he had to go."

"Very well, Janet," Hester said. "Tell Mr. Guard I shall be down so soon as I've taken off my shawl and bonnet. No, you take them to my room, please," and she drew off her gloves, and untied her bonnet strings.

Her thought was despairing; why should Will Guard, of all folk in Hobarton, visit her that evening, when she wanted the time only for thought . . . thought . . . of Holtham and the child? She entered the parlour; Guard, of good looks, clear-eyed, and bronzed with the sun and the sea, his hair streaked with grey at the temples, his black suit shabby but well-cut, was standing by the hearth. He advanced with look and exclamation of pleasure; the pressure of his fingers on her hand was firm, and his answer to her stiff greeting, and his expression, showed delight: "Why, Hester, I thought I'd have to go away without seeing you. And I've so much to say to you."

She laughed coldly, moving to her chair by the table: "But it's so late now, Will, that I'm afraid you'll have very little time to tell me anything. Mamma and Julia will be returning from the concert with Mr. Marley."

"It's not so late," he told her, standing by the hearth, and ignoring her pointing to a chair, and her murmur, "Won't you sit down?" "I'd hoped to be here early this evening, but I was kept late at my office. There was so much to discuss with my head clerk, and so much to write. I undertook to have everything in readiness for Lade in the morning."

She said, smiling faintly, "I'm afraid I'm not very clever in understanding business matters, Will."

"And I fear I'm not happy in explaining," he said, laughing. "But briefly, Hester, I'm entering into a partnership which promises well for my house. It's likely to put it on a firm foundation,

in fact, make it strong enough to compete even with the House of Walham."*

She thought instantly, with sympathy and with no disapproval, of the whispered scandal of Rose Walham, head of the Walham Stores, and ship-owner, and of the shadow of old scandal from the Richmond district, and of this acute interest of hers in the mate Lone, young enough to be her son. She murmured indefinitely, "But she is very rich and powerful, Will."

"I admit that. I have a just appreciation of her ability," he conceded grimly. "There's a rumour that she's entering on a new and ambitious enterprise—turning ship-owner on a big scale. But she has all the advantage of old Robert Walham's fortune from the East India Company. And always our resources have been too small—we've been compelled to operate on too trifling a scale, for serious competition. And our San Francisco venture turned out disastrously; we lost heavily, like so many merchants and shippers. That made it vital, compelled the decision on me, to admit into partnership—" he hesitated. "I fear, Hester, you may not approve of my choice of a partner."

She had forced her attention with difficulty. Stifling a yawn, and she said, "But, my dear Will, how can my opinion affect you?"

He said eagerly, with an admiring look at her, "But I assure you that it is all in all to me, Hester."

"Thank you," she said hastily, blushing and fearing.

"But my hope, Hester, all these years, when I've been too poor—in straitened circumstances, to dare——"

*"And all that beauty."

She checked him hurriedly. "Pray, Mr. Guard," she said, "tell me why you should doubt my approval of your new partner."

He coloured at the rebuff; he said with some confusion, "Hester, possibly you've not heard of John Holtham?"

She started; she glanced sharply at him, trembling now; at his inquiring look and air of waiting for an answer, she murmured faintly, "Yes, I have heard, yes."

"And you know that he—well, he holds a conditional pardon. He has not long been at liberty?"

"Yes, I know this."

"He is very wealthy. The word of his inheritance reached Lade within a week or two of Holtham's liberation."

She said—so faintly that scarcely he heard her—now not looking at him, but sitting with her head bent, and with her fingers intertwining, "Are you sure . . . is this wise, Mr. Guard? You're confident . . . of his honesty?"

He said earnestly, "Your doubt's quite natural, Hester. He was certainly sent out here for dishonesty, some trifling embezzlement as a young clerk years ago. Why, now I come to think of it, Hester, what must you think of me? I'm very dull to-night surely. Lade made some passing reference to Holtham's having been assigned your father's servant in Richmond."

"Yes. I wasn't anxious to mention this to you of course. Go on, please!"

"I did not press the matter," he told her. "Holtham himself was in my office at the time, and I thought wiser or kinder to ignore the reference. Do you remember him, Hester?"

She forced the answer slowly, "Yes. Quite well."

"But what happened then, Hester? He'd not have been sent to Port Arthur from assigned service except for misconduct. What was it?"

She said lifelessly, "He quarrelled with my father. He was sent before the court, and sentenced to punishment in the chain-gang. And from there, I suppose the cruelty drove him to Port Arthur. I wish you would not ask me, Will. I wish you'd ask Mr. Lade or Mr. Holtham himself. I . . ."

"Why, Hester, how pale you are. You seem faint. Shall I ring for the maid, or open the window wide?"

"No. I'm not faint, thank you," she told him with a wan smile. "Go on, please. You're taking the man into partnership—is that it? He'll bring a great deal of money with him?"

"So much money that the thought of any future dishonesty of his must be ridiculous, Hester."

"I did not hint at anything of the kind, Will."

He eyed her doubtfully. "No. But I expected you to question—doubt the expediency of my admitting an emancipist into partnership. I mean from the standpoint of the credit of my house, Hester, and the natural prejudice in trading circles."

She said deliberately, "I should disregard such considerations, Will. If only you're convinced of the man's reform, uprightness, now—isn't that enough?"

He nodded: "That's true, Hester. I consider many of these poor fellows less at fault than Downing Street. That a mere lad should be transported for a trifling dishonesty seems to me the crime, not the dishonesty or folly. Still, in

spite of Sir William Denison, and in spite of Earl Grey, yes, and in spite of all the officials who batten on the System, we're bringing transportation to its end. We'll see no more shiploads of poor wretches landed here. But I'm forgetting my subject, and I'm boring you, Hester. I've agreed to admit Holtham into partnership. He brings with him enough money to encourage me—" looking tenderly down at her, "to make me dared to hope—at last to ask——"

She interrupted with intensity of relief, "Oh, not now, Will. Please not now! There's Mr. Marley's carriage. Mamma and Julia are home, and——"

"But, Hester, may I dare to hope——?"

She started up, and fluttered toward the door. "Will, don't ask me! Please, please don't!"

CHAPTER IX

FREE COLONIST

MRS. CARRICK, her silver Cashmere shawl floating about her shoulders, and her ivory-handled fan swinging from her wrist, entered the room, with Julie and Marley following. She greeted Mr. Guard with polite condescension, and rustled to her chair by the hearth. Julia's curtsy displayed exquisitely the silver and the rose of her gown. She seated herself on the ottoman against the wall. Marley with a nod and stiff greeting, "Well, Guard!" stalked after her, but was defeated by her voluminous skirt in his purpose to seat himself beside her, and sat down on the frail, gilt-legged chair at hand.

To Guard's question, "Did you enjoy the concert?" Mrs. Carrick answered graciously, "Oh, very much, thank you. The audience was select and fashionable. Sir William was present with dear Lady Denison. . . . Hester, my love, will you go, please, and tell the maid to bring in wine and sandwiches?"

"There's no need, Mamma," Julia said, fanning herself languidly. "I spoke to Janet in the hall."

"How very thoughtful of you, my love! Won't you sit down, Mr. Guard?" glancing with disapproval at him, as he leaned against the chimney-piece.

"Why, no, I think not, thank you, Mrs. Carrick,"

he said. "I should be home by now. I've had a tiring day, and there's a busy day ahead of me."

Hester had returned to her chair. She sat, with eyes downcast, and a sense of fluttering terror: would Guard reveal to Mamma her absence from the house?

"But you'll take a glass of wine before you go, Mr. Guard?" Mrs. Carrick said sweetly.

"No, thank you."

"What's this story about you, Guard?" Marley drawled.

"What story?" Guard asked, his brow lifted, and his lips supercilious.

"Is it true that you're entering into partnership, with the idea of competing with the Walham house?"

Hester coloured, and did not dare to raise her eyes.

"Really!" Julia made a languid show of interest. "Miss Walham was not at the concert this evening."

"Miss Walham," Mrs. Carrick declared severely, "is not a theme congenial to me, or to you, I think, my dear Julia."

Julia laughed, posed elegantly on the ottoman, and made graceful play with her fan. "You haven't answered Mr. Marley's question, Mr. Guard," she said. "Do tell us! You're taking a partner, and you're thinking to compete with the Walham house . . . Or is it a secret? Has Mr. Marley been indiscreet?"

Guard answered stiffly, "Not at all, Miss Julia. Marley may know now a fact which the city will know definitely to-morrow. I am admitting a partner—yes."

Hester repressed desire to cry out and silence him.

"Not Holtham, surely?" Marley said in an undertone.

"Holtham—yes," Guard answered. "And why not, Marley?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders; he said with a show of indifference, "The choice is for you, naturally."

"Naturally, sir."

"But who is this Mr. Holtham?" Julia asked, ignoring the flash of Mrs. Carrick's eyes and the admonitory shake of her head.

Still Hester did not speak or stir.

"My dear Miss Julia," Guard said calmly, "he's to be my partner from to-morrow. He's a man of considerable means."

"A new arrival?" Julia asked.

"In a sense, yes," Guard conceded dryly. "He has come among us quite recently."

"Why not tell Miss Carrick?" Marley said, smiling.

"Why not?" Guard retorted. "Miss Julia, Mr. Marley objects to my partner because he is an emancipist; he holds a conditional pardon."

"Not . . . not the Holtham who was Papa's servant years ago?" Julia cried, her brows lifted with show of astonishment, and her tone disdainful. "Oh, surely not, Mr. Guard!"

"Julia!" Mrs. Carrick protested. "I beg you——"

Hester believed that her mother feared discussion of Holtham even as she feared. She sat motionless and drooping in her chair.

Guard, with hot colour in his brown cheeks, and anger in his tone, said hastily, "Holtham himself avoids no reference to his history, Miss

Julia, so why should I? My partner from tomorrow is the John Holtham, who, I believe, was your father's assigned servant when you were a child."

"You're confident and trusting, aren't you, Guard?" Marley sneered.

"I think not, sir." Guard's sneer matched his.

"But, Mr. Guard," Julia began, "Mamma will correct me if I'm wrong—the man stole from Papa and was sent to the chain-gang because——"

Mrs. Carrick, as afraid of Hester, now sitting rigid in her chair, pale as death, yet her eyes ablaze, interrupted swiftly in cold and leaden tone, "Julia, I must insist. The subject is not a fit one for you."

"Mamma, dear," Julia drawled, "I'm no longer a child. And what else do we talk of in these days than prisoners, and the end of transportation, and Sir William's insistence on the rights of Downing Street to send us whom it will, and— Pray forgive me, Mamma. And forgive me, Mr. Guard. I did not think for an instant to prejudice you against your partner—" with a faint sneer.

"On the question of his honesty—" Guard began; Marley interrupted. "Why, the fellow's a thief twice convicted!"

"What is your grudge against him, Marley?" Guard demanded, his eyes angry and direct.

"Grudge! My dear fellow! I have no grudge against him, or his class. I employ them on my land; but if I were a merchant and shipper like you, I'd not employ them in the conduct of my office, or my warehouse, sir. I think the distinction cannot be too rigid; that is all. I regret your choice."

"Of Holtham ?"

"I speak on the general principle, Guard," Marley said coldly. "I should no more think of admitting to our society any emancipist than—Mrs. Carrick, you'll forgive me !—you, Madam, would dream of admitting a child of convict parents to the society of your young ladies."

"But touching Holtham's honesty," Guard said, turning his back deliberately on Marley, "you, Mrs. Carrick, can give me the facts of his sentence from your employment to the chain-gang if you will be so kind ?"

Hester had risen, unable to endure.

Mrs. Carrick countered instantly ; "Thank you, Hester, yes. Do go and tell Janet to hurry. You're so thoughtful, my love. Pardon me, Mr. Guard. I'm sorry that I can't give you any information. I was not at all interested in the man at the time. I cannot remember my dear husband's discussing the case with me. And if I could remember, I should hesitate now to discuss Holtham with you."

Guard bowed, his aspect sardonic, and his brows frowning. He hastened to open the door for Hester, going out quietly—blindly.

CHAPTER X

MRS. CARRICK AND SECURITY

MARLEY and Guard were gone. The sounds of the resumed dispute between them echoed from Marley's carriage till the gates were closed. Hester would have escaped to her room after their departure. She had maintained composure only with difficulty through the service of refreshments. Silence had seemed characteristic, but not this aspect of pain and terror and this wildness of eyes, reflected from the mirror when, rising from her chair, and thinking now to rush from the room, she was checked by her mother's words: "Don't go, Hester, please."

Mrs. Carrick sat still by the hearth, her fan lying idle on her lap. Julia posed gracefully yet on the ottoman. Hester, not looking at Mrs. Carrick, said wearily, "What is it, Mamma? I'm very tired. Please let me go to bed."

"Presently, to be sure. I want to ask you only: were you out of the house while we were at the concert?"

"Why?"

"I am answered, Hester," Mrs. Carrick said calmly. "I noticed that your shoes were dusty, that was all. But your manner was very strange while Mr. Marley and Mr. Guard were here. You should try to control yourself at least in the

presence of my guests. Where, may I ask, have you been ?"

Hester stood white and hesitant; she heard the cold, measured voice repeat: "Where have you been, Hester ?"

She said then, "Do you wish me to tell you, with Julia here ?"

Julia closed her fan, and rose at once. "I don't wish to stay, Mother, Hester," she said scornfully, "if you're going to quarrel. It is not interesting to me."

"There's no need for you to go, Julia," Mrs. Carrick declared. "Hester is behaving foolishly—and——"

"Mamma, please!" Julia interrupted. "I've told you that I don't wish to listen. Hester and I are not children."

"Are you correcting me, Julia ?" Mrs. Carrick said stiffly. Julia, with light laughter retorted, "No, Mamma. I'm only reminding you that Hester and I are old enough to think and act occasionally for ourselves. Hester, you don't want me to stay, do you ?—" with a glance of sympathy and amusement at her sister. At Hester's shake of head, Julia nodded, fluttered forward to her mother, and bent to kiss her: "Good night, Mamma."

Mrs. Carrick received her kiss placidly, and answered, "Good night, Julia."

Julia, with a smile at Hester, walked slowly from the room, her tarlatan gown rustling and billowing, the flickering of the candle-light finding the gleam in the gold of her hair, and touching the crystals at her ears and the rose-whiteness of her shoulders. Hester had a sense of her sister's

beauty, as of a spirit and possible alliance strange to her.

Mrs. Carrick was silent, till the door was closed—motionless and inscrutable of look—her features, marble in their repose and pallor, revealing nothing of her thoughts or resentment of Julia's defection. She said then, "I am waiting to hear, Hester, whom you visited this evening?"

"You know, Mamma," Hester said quietly. "You've guessed, so soon as you noticed that I had been walking."

"Hester," her mother said, her voice expressionless and her gaze clear and direct, "long ago I saved your name; I kept secret your association with this man. You have lived a secluded yet safe life with me. You have been compelled, as your sister and I, to work hard, yet always as a gentlewoman, and like Julia and myself, you have won and hold an honoured name. Will you throw all this away in folly? Will you destroy all that I have built? Yes, folly, folly—it is no more than folly—for thought of your duty to this man or this child."

Hester said lifelessly, "Have I spoken of duty, Mother?"

"I can imagine no other cause in you, Hester."

She said, with a choking sob, "You can't! Duty! It isn't that. It isn't because he is my husband."

"I question that, Hester."

"Do you? You have deceived yourself, Mother, as you have deceived others."

"If I have deceived others, or myself, Hester, it has been for you."

"Mother! Mother! Is it more shameful to me that a convict is my husband than that . . .

than that . . . oh, I can scarcely say this, Mother—is it more shameful to have given my child into cruel hands than to acknowledge and to tend my child? Only for a name; the folly of a name!"

"The child was given into honest hands, Hester."

"And my husband given back to slavery—cruel slavery—on a charge that was not true."

"Hester, he deserved a heavier punishment for his conduct toward you."

"He loved me, Mother. That was his only sin against me—loving me. And he was only a boy; and I was just a foolish girl. And . . . and . . . remembering him, as he was then, and seeing him to-day . . . to-night, as he is now, as he has been made by all the dreadful years, what must I think of you, Mother?"

She said, unmoved, "Why did you go to his house to-night, Hester?"

"Hoping to see my child."

"Did you see her?"

"No. He would not let me see her. No."

"What does he think to do? What does he hope? That I shall receive the child?"

"I ask this of you, Mother, Mother!"

"Hester, how can you ask—dare to ask?" she said, with bitter scorn.

"If . . . if . . . she were admitted under another name; if he could be induced to consent to this?"

"Hester. I have no dealings with this man."

"But if none knew——?"

"Hester, how absurd!"

"Not absurd, Mother."

"How false, then, to my trust!" she said. "Do

you credit me, Hester, with no standard of honour and fair dealing and duty toward the parents of my girls, that you ask this? Bring secretly into my school a convict's daughter!"

Hester cried out, "Yet my daughter, Mother!"

She said, with a cold laugh, "I don't believe that the insolence this afternoon was more than the fellow's show of hate and defiance toward me. I do not expect further attempt from him. You may be better informed than I, Hester. But understand this clearly: I go my way; I do my duty, as I interpret my duty. I bid you have no dealings, no communication, with this fellow. I expect you to go about your work as usual as though nothing had happened. And let this fellow have a care; for surely as I punished his effrontery long ago, I shall punish again. On any new attempt, to injure me, or force himself upon our notice, I go to the Governor himself. I warn you, Hester, and I warn him. And I demand obedience."

"You demand that again . . . again . . . I put him out of my life," she said in a leaden tone, not looking at her mother. "Yes, I might obey in this—but for my child, Mother."

"Hester, I demand!"

"Mother, I'll not obey!"

CHAPTER XI

SATURDAY

ON Monday Mrs. Carrick's Boarding and Day School for the Daughters of Gentlefolk would reopen. On Friday and Saturday the main road coaches halted at the end of the lane to set down daughters of Midland and Derwent Valley gentlefolk; of sound Colonial stock from East India Company and English agricultural parentage; red-eyed, red-nosed daughters of gentlefolk: for the most, moist of pocket handkerchiefs, dusty of bonnets, of plaid dresses, of starched petticoats, dusty of shoes and frills. There they were, set down at the corner of the lane from the New town Road, with their boxes, linen-covered and initialled: those boxes with their best muslins, their blue linen, their foulards and their barèges, their infinite supply of starched and frilled garments, their boxes with their Sunday bonnets.

Miss Hester in the Carrick carriage and Miss Corder, the governess, in a cab to receive these daughters of gentlefolk, to check alike sniffling and giggling—oh, awfully to repress giggling!—to substitute dry handkerchiefs for hopelessly moist and crumpled cambric, to comfort and to caress, and, like ogresses, Hester had thought on many such occasions, to carry them off to Carrick Castle and Mamma as the presiding Ogress, and to Miss Julia, and to Mrs. Loyne—Mamma had admitted long since her hesitation in engaging even so

impeccable a matron, widow of a minister of the Church of England, so rigid, so frigid, so practical yet so devout—Mamma had hesitated for the implied indelicacy of the name.

Daughters of gentlefolk, guarded by Mammas and Papas, and driven up to the very doors of Carrick Castle, and given over into the custody of Mrs. Carrick as Prime Ogress. Mamma bland, placid and stately. Julia coldly elegant. Hester pale and abstracted, and smiling wanly and remotely to the compliments of parents or guardians, and the affection of old pupils. Gentle, kindly, and consoling to shy and sobbing new pupils. Directing swiftly and competently the reception and disposal of young ladies and their wardrobes, the service of tea to Mammas and Papas, and at six o'clock presiding over the urn at the long tea-table and the assemblage of young ladies, so far resigned to destiny now as to nibble bread and butter and plain—oh, plainest of plain cake, and to sip the weakest of weak tea.

Sparing Mamma all responsibility on the Saturday evening except at prayers. Making her round of the dormitories, to comfort still this or that sobbing daughter of gentlefolk, to tuck up this or that restless daughter of gentlefolk, and, because of the warmth of the summer night, disregarding all principles of health, all risks of deaths of cold, by opening the casement windows slightly. Worn out, she sought at last her own room, but, for the thought of Holtham and the little girl—what could be her name? Something so dear, so delightful, so absurd!—not to go to bed, not to think of sleep, but to sit by the window, conjecturing, hoping, doubting and fearing:

what did Holtham's silence for these days mean?

Through fear of Mrs. Carrick's influence and of official retaliation-risk to his hard-won liberty, return to his prison, or for thought of Hester, pity of her, or for manliness in spite of all the degradation of the years, could Holtham have abandoned his thought of a hostile move against Carrick House, and his demand that the little girl should be admitted to the school have meant no more than he had said that night: he had been drinking heavily, that was all.

She pictured him as he had come to the house that afternoon, arrogant and vulgar, the strength suggested by the broadcloth—covered shoulders, the muscular arms, the coarse, jewelled hands, the pride and play of his eyes, yet in his power and strength and confident poise of head, the suggestion of the stoop of servitude, the calloused hands, the broad, flat nails, the husky voice, the ineradicable stain of penal servitude.

And the brutal and besotted figure of him at his house, the parade of drunkenness, and the display of hate and contempt for her—for all the Carricks. The figure stamping out her picture of him, treasured down the years, as handsome lad, with all the possibilities for good in him, if only . . . if only Heaven had been merciful to him and her! If only God had willed that she should be the redemption of her lover . . . lover . . . lover!

Could she have cared; could she have loved to distraction; could she have stepped down from her high place, to face life with him, had she thought, dreamed, that the Holtham of to-day could be?

Idle to tell herself that this Holtham was not the man whom she and he would have fashioned from life, but the creature of the prisons! Idle the thought, the wild fancy, the desperate sense of duty, that she, his wife, and mother of his child, should face the world with him still—destiny with him still! Idle the thought ever to love—endure him, drunkard, degraded. Ever!

But for the little girl.

Oh, the little girl with the dark, untidy ringlets under the silly, big bonnet, with the flaunting silken ribbons! Oh, the poor, pretty, over-dressed little girl, frightened, shrinking, sobbing, repelled by her own folk! Oh, the years, the years, of childhood warped by harshness, cruelty! Oh, the laughter and the light that should have been—and had not been—through hateful wrong! Oh, the poor, little, thin shoulders through the foolish frock, the peaked white face, the sad lips! Oh, the years that might have been for the little girl and her mother!

Hester's fingers, loosening her hair before her dressing-glass, twined as though to pluck out the golden strands. She saw the reflection of her face, white, desperate and tormented, and her bloodless lips. And with her thought of the little girl, the years that had been, and the years that were to be in Holtham's charge, her spirit was quickened, strengthened, for revolt against her mother, the placid, passionless woman of these days, going her cold and languid way as headmistress of Carrick House, making no further mention of Holtham, pretending that life was passed in its narrow, rigid way, as though nothing had happened, nothing could happen to disturb the silence of

its cloisters, and to challenge her dignity and self-esteem and peace. As though . . .

She heard a tapping on the door, and at Julia's question, "May I come in, please, Hester?" she answered wearily, "Yes, Julia."

Not the prim, stiff Miss Julia, in the reception of parent or guardian, but a fair and laughing Julia, rose-red and rose-white, in her rose-striped taffeta gown, fluttered into the room, put her arms about Hester, and said with laughing excitement, "Wish me happiness, Hester, please—please! You do, don't you, darling?"

"Why, always, always, Julia," Hester said, laughing faintly to her laughter. "But why to-night rather than any other night?"; and with sudden startled thought, "You mean—don't you?—that Mr. Marley has asked you to marry him, and you've accepted him."

She was unable to exclude the thought of Henry Marley's hostility toward, and contempt for, Holtham; her tone was dull and lifeless, and its influence on her sister was instant. They were standing before the tall mirror—Hester wan and delicate and sombre of dress, in contrast with Julia's animation, good looks and becoming gown. Julia's face flushed; her eyes grew angry; her white arms sank from Hester's shoulders.

She said coldly, "Is this all you have to say to me, Hester? Knowing how I love Henry; how I've hoped! Hester, if it had been you, if you and Will Guard were to be married, as . . . as . . . I hope you will be some day . . . soon, do you think I'd have spoken so?"

"How . . . spoken?" Hester faltered.

"So coldly, Hester."

"Dear, I'm very tired."

"I'll go, then."

"No, please, please! Sit down by the window: the breeze is cool."

"You'll rest better in bed, Hester."

"No, Julia dear. No. I want you to talk to me, and tell me all about your happiness, and your plans."

"Oh, very well, then, Hester." Julia sat down in the arm-chair beside the open casement. Hester blew out the candles before the dressing-glass, and drew back the curtains. The moonlight flooded the room. She sat down, facing her sister, planning that the shadow of the curtain should not reveal her expression, and intending to control her voice and conceal the note of terror . . . terror. Julia's happiness in the engagement with Henry Marley! "Well, darling?"

"Hester, I didn't think, I didn't dream," Julia said, petulantly, "that you could begrudge me my happiness."

"Julia, how can you think so?"

"But, Hester, your tone and your look when I told you. If you'd hated Henry or been afraid of him——"

"But I don't hate him, Julia, and I'm not afraid of him."

"I'm not so sure, Hester. You were so strange the other evening when he quarrelled with Will Guard for forming a partnership with Father's assigned servant."

"I thought," Hester said in muffled tone, "that he should be more tolerant, Julia. The man has served his sentence, and he should be given the chance to redeem himself and to lead a new life."

"Yes, Hester, but Henry thinks—I know because he's spoken very seriously of this to me—that Will Guard is really betraying his own class in taking a convict as his partner, even though the man is so rich. Henry thinks, as Mamma thinks, that Will Guard, coming like Henry, of an old English county family, should think more of his class than to mix with the prisoners. You know Henry's father and Will's father were officers of the East India Company, before they settled here."

"I don't think many people follow that principle," Hester said faintly.

"No. But Henry thinks they should. At any rate, in the case of a man like Holtham. Why, Henry says he's notorious in Hobarton already, though he's been free so few months."

"But, Julia," Hester protested, "you were going to tell me, weren't you, of your engagement?"

"If you care to listen, Hester."

"Why, of course I do. When did he propose, dear?"

"This evening. He asked Mamma's permission, just after dinner. And then he proposed to me. And, Hester, Hester, you can't dream what it means to me. How much he is to me. He's so handsome, isn't he, Hester?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"And so rich. Though that doesn't matter to me. But I shall love his wonderful house in the Midlands—it's so richly furnished."

"He's so wealthy and he thinks so much of England that I wonder he cares to live in a Colony," Hester said, repressing a sneer.

"I suppose it's because his home is here, after

all, Hester. But he intends that we travel soon after we're married."

"When do you think to marry, Julia ?"

"He wants it to be soon. But Mamma seems unwilling for some reason. She spoke of putting it off till the end of the year. Isn't that idea absurd, darling ? She said she didn't know how she could carry on the school alone. And when I reminded her that surely with you and another governess to take my place, she could manage quite easily, she didn't answer. I thought for some reason she seemed doubtful about you, Hester."

Hester was silent, sitting back in her chair, so that the shadow hid her face still when the curtain blew in with the breeze.

"Hester," Julia said, leaning forward, "I can't imagine that you've felt about anyone—ever been in love so much that you can understand how I feel about Harry Marley. No, that isn't mere selfishness, and it isn't love-sickness ; I'm not a silly girl, thinking no one can ever have loved as she ; I'm not so very young, after all. It's only how I think of you, Hester ; just gentle and kind and placid, and beautiful in your way : you'd be lovely, Hester, if you had more animation."

"Dear, but I'm weary," Hester whispered.

"Of all to-day's work and worry—you must be."

"No, of life."

Julia did not heed her, talking now in a gay tone yet with a suggestion of apprehension : "Hester, the other evening, when you wouldn't go with me to the concert—it's the first request you've refused me I can remember—and when we came home, Mamma and I, you were so strange

and pale, while Harry and Will Guard were talking about that man Holtham. And later you and Mamma quarrelled; oh, I know. I didn't ask the reason. I don't want to know: only . . . only, Hester, you and Mamma have scarcely spoken to each other since, and I know that she is grieving and worrying—oh, dreadfully!"

"She does not show it," Hester said bitterly.

"No. But I can tell," Julia said. "And I have been worrying, too. It's like a cloud over my happiness, Hester; the thought, the fear, that the quarrel is more serious than I'd have thought possible a week ago, and that it may relate in some way to this Holtham."

"How . . . to . . . Holtham?" Hester asked in a stifled tone.

"I know the man came to the house with his daughter—he said the child was his daughter: Janet told me. I know that he had the impudence to think that Mamma would admit the child to the school."

"Have you spoken to Mamma?"

"Mamma has declined to tell me, Hester," Julia said. And—with sudden terror in her voice—"Hester, there isn't, there can't have been . . . Hester, the man hasn't any hold over us, has he? That isn't the reason why you've never cared, even for Guard?"

Hester started up; Julia rose instantly, her hands stretching toward her sister as to embrace her. Hester avoided her hands, leaning back against the window-sill, and demanding harshly, "What has Mamma said to you?"

"Nothing! Nothing, Hester!"

"Oh, why pretend? Why lie to me? She told

you, didn't she? Didn't she? What Holtham is to me."

White and trembling, Julia repeated, "Is to you! What can he be to you?"

Hester said slowly and hoarsely, her head held high, yet her eyes blind with tears, "He is my husband, and the little girl is mine. And they are all to me."

Julia did not speak, but stared at her with eyes of horror.

Hester went on, her voice now hoarse, now rising, shrill and strained, "All to me. Life to me. The little girl, my little girl, Holtham's, Holtham's. You, and Marley, and Guard, and Mother, how can you count to me? What can you ever be in my life? Don't stare at me like that! Don't sneer at me!"

"Hester!"

"Julia, only pity me. You don't speak, Julia. You only stare at me and sneer. You only think, not of me, the sorrow and the shame to me; of Holtham, Holtham, or my broken heart, my love, my longing for my little girl. You only think of Marley and his pride, and of the hurt to you."

Julia cried out in harsh and jangling tone, "Your heart! Your shame! Your sorrow! What of me and mine? Oh, I've always suspected, guessed, why Holtham was sent away from the Richmond house, and why I was kept at school all that year. But now . . . now, when happiness offers to me, your folly, your wickedness, is to spoil all my life, my life."

Hester retorted, "How can it hurt you; matter to you? Marley need not know, till you're

married, need he? You and Mother won't tell Marley."

"I have a sense of honour, Hester," Julia cried; Hester answered with bitter scorn, "But you'll not speak, Julia. You'll not tell him till you're married. You love him so much, you tell me: you won't lose his love, and his name, and all he offers you, for sense of honour."

"Hester, you're hateful. If I keep silence, it will be for you and Mamma, not for myself. But you, Hester, but you, and such a man as Holtham! Will you—can he—keep silence?"

Hester said harshly, "I shall keep silence—for a price. And keep him silent—for a price."

"What do you mean, Hester?"

"My little girl, if she comes to the school, as any other girl. If I can teach her, tend her, watch over her, like any other girl."

"Hester, you know that's impossible. Mamma will not consent."

"Oh, will she not?" Hester sneered, with a dark sense of triumph on her. "But she will! It is my price, Julia."

"But it would ruin the school which Mamma has built up out of poverty. Hester! You can't mean it; you can't dream."

"I dream. I dream. . . . You'd better go now, Julia. I can't bear any more."

"Hester, I thought, I hoped, when Harry and I were married, you would help Mamma to carry on the school, till you and Guard—but that's all over now. Of course that's over. Hester, you've spoilt your own life. Don't spoil mine! Harry mustn't know; he couldn't marry me if you—if Holtham——"

"How much he loves you, Julia, if his pride is greater than his justice to you!"

Julia said, sobbing. "Hester, if I lose him through you, I'll not forgive: all my life I'll not forgive you. Hester, how can you count this wretched man as more than me . . . Mamma . . . who love you, Hester?"

"I do not count him more."

"But you do, Hester!"

"No. The little girl. My little girl!"

CHAPTER XII

SABBATH

SUNDAY morning, and the bells of Holy Trinity Church attuned to the beauty of sunlight and the singing of the breeze. Trinity bells chiming from their high pinnacled town of stone, pale gold to the summer light, and all the Sabbath sounds subjected to the splendour of the bells, the glory of the bells, symphonic with the ecstasy of sunlight, this silver floating of the clouds across blue sky, this silver show of sunshine.

The low drift of the white cloud crowned Mt. Wellington with silver: in the white haze rising from the south, the Mount was exquisite in sea blue.

Hester, walking sedately by Mrs. Carrick's side down Argyle Street, for High Street, and Church Street, and Trinity, was faintly conscious of beauty all about her, of gardens at few, stately houses, and cottage gardens, with the richness of snap-dragons, purple and yellow sweet sultans, pansies; roses blowing pink and white, and the perfume of mignonette, and clove pinks, with woodbine and honeysuckle trailing about porches. And all the while picturing Holtham's garden and its colours and its ecstatic scents, and the tinkling of its fountain. And all the while responding to the silver sounding of the bells.

Mrs. Carrick's girls, twelve now assembled for the opening of the school to-morrow, tripping two by two to church. Miss Julia with Miss

Corder; Mrs. Carrick with Miss Carrick. Twelve girls, walking sedately; flutter of flaxen curls, brown curls, black curls; flutter of bonnet strings and ribbons; decorous billowing of muslin skirts above stiff-starched petticoats; decorous display of frilled ankles above shining shoes. The governess neat in grey; Miss Julia exquisite in pink-striped taffeta with silken shawl and white veil fluttering before rose-trimmed bonnet; little leaf-green parasol upraised against sunlight. Mrs. Carrick majestic in black silk and floating Cashmere shawl; Miss Hester pale and colourless in blue taffeta, blue-ribboned straw bonnet, with little parasol of white.

Mrs. Carrick, then, her daughters, the governess, and twelve young ladies walking, two by two, descending the hill, by the way through fields, past gardens, across the bridge spanning the stream; past mansions, past cottages.

Wheeling to right, ignoring the tavern set back from the road, with a drunken reprobate propped against the sawn tree-trunk; ignoring the neat stone tavern to left; ignoring the dissenting chapel—dear me, yes!

Wheeling to left, and passing up Church Street toward Holy Trinity crowning the hill.

It rose in a splendour of golden stone against the hazy blue of the morning, a very glory to the Lord in loveliness of form, to that high belfry, where the bells summoned to worship, and acclaimed the loving kindness of God. And all the sounding of the eight bells was praise, and all was beauty, and in the sweetness of the bells, in the joy of the bells, there seemed the very spirit of the morning, and of youth, and of laughter, or

in the more solemn tones, the deeper soundings, a call to thought, to hope, to reverence, and to intercession with the Lord, yet as with a loving Parent, and to the reflection that on these sunlit moments life was as fleeting as on the wings of this lilting, leaping breeze, and to supplication for a mercy immeasurable and enduring.

Hester had heed of beauty still, despite her fears and sadness. Sounds of praise and promise seemed to float to her mind upon the music of the bells, ever upon the sounding of the bells: "O give thanks unto the Lord for He is gracious, and His mercy endureth for ever."

She bowed her head, passing by the high, carved doorway into the columned dimness of the church—dimness it seemed after the bright glitter of the sunlight. She waited with Mamma, watchful of the decorous entry of twelve young ladies into three box-pews, to right against the wall; Miss Corder took the end seat of the first pew; Julia the second, Hester the third, Mamma, in the fourth pew, sat in state and alone. Hester assured herself of the bowing of bonnets and of the murmur of prayers ere she bent her head. Her prayers were formless, as her purpose, for Holtham and the child; she had an indefinite sense of striving to fashion supplication, not for guidance, not for pity and forgiveness for herself, but only for Holtham, only for the little girl.

She raised her head; she was dimly responsive to the beauty of environment, splendour of columns, dark splendour of the arched roofs, austerity of altar and gilding of cross, silver of glass, and its glory of crimson and gold, and a heavenly blue. She heeded the rustling, fluttering

and whispering; she noted the whiteness of feathered bonnets, the flowers, the ribbons, shawls and mantles, a medley of colours become a harmony as by the serene lighting of the church from its high windows; contrast of black of broadcloth, whiteness of linen; prosperous folk of Hobarton and poor; fashion and fustian. She sat stiffly in her pew, pretending, from habit, to maintain a dragon-like watchfulness over her charges, no whispering, no giggling—good gracious, no! No restlessness; no creaking of the pews; no turning of heads, no sidelong glances, but decorum through those few moments ere the sounding of the voice of the Rev. Philip Palmer, the giving out of the hymn, the music of the organ from its gallery, the blending of voices from galleries and from about her in a richness of tone.

She did not share in the singing of the hymn. Her lips moved through the responses from her practice of example to the girls. She heard the sweetness of their singing and the fineness of Julia's voice. She heard the murmur and the softness of responses, the dignity of the clergyman's voice; she was responsive, as always, to the Psalms, the plaint and the beauty of the organ and the singers; her spirit seemed merged in this plaint and this beauty. Her spirit, not her voice, bore share in the praise, the protest, the hope, the faith, the pride; her spirit sang:

"O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness; and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men.

"For He satisfieth the empty soul: and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

"Such as sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron. . . ."

She started, trembled, knew her face stained with hot colour, seeing thus late in the service Holtham and the child conducted swiftly and noiselessly up the aisle by the old grey verger to the empty pew immediately before the Carrick pews. She thought instantly to control sick sense of swoon and sick fear, seeing his tall, black-clad figure, and the blue silken dress and the absurd, white straw bonnet with the vivid red ribbons of the little girl.

She conjectured, trembling, Holtham's purpose in coming to the church. She saw him set down his high hat and gloves and cane, and the velvet-bound, metal-clasped prayer book for the child. Hester noticed that he did not bow in prayer, but stood, high of head, square of shoulders: she had a sense of challenge to the Holy place, the worshippers, the Lord. Almost the figures faded from her sight through the swimming of her senses.

"O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men."

The verse of the Psalm rolled about her in a mocking splendour of sound.

CHAPTER XIII

WALKING HOME

THE service, which had seemed intolerable to Hester, was ended; she was walking down the aisle beside her mother, following Julia, the governess, and the girls toward the door. The organ sounded softly from the gallery.

Forms and colours grew indefinite as the notes of stately music; shadows of the church seemed closing in upon her, with the realization that the little girl was walking to her right; she fought against sick sense of fainting, the wild beating of her heart, and the trembling of her hands. On the meeting of the streams of worshippers in the porch the child was thrust against her; involuntarily Hester's hand stole out about her shoulders; at the touch the child glanced up at her and smiled shyly.

The sunlight flowed into the doorway; with the instant thought and the fear still of her mother, Julia, and the spectators, Hester withdrew her arm: she did not glance at Holtham, now moving forward. Following custom she set herself to marshalling her charges in the churchyard to the right of the porch. Mrs. Carrick stood composed, and imperturbable, and pretending to ignore Holtham passing by with the child. The girls were assembled under the eyes of Julia and the governess; Hester checked swiftly the stifled sounds of giggling: "Helen! Helen Millard, do you hear me?"

"Yes, Miss Carrick."

"Why are you laughing ? How dare you laugh ?" Hester demanded with a sudden note of fierceness in her tone, at the thought, the knowledge, that the girls were laughing at the child, going by in her absurd blue silk frock, and big bonnet, with display of lace petticoat and frills under the bulging skirt, the elaborate prayer-book in her little gloved hand; stepping at Holtham's side toward the waiting carriage glittering with glass and metal, and the restive horses held by a coachman in livery. Hester understood the stares, the whispering and the tittering from the throng about the porch, and knew their purport.

Holtham . . . the notorious Holtham! The enriched convict; but who was the child ?

She saw him help the child lightly and tenderly into the carriage; then turn, and survey boldly and contemptuously the crowd moving slowly from the doorway of the church, or halted to gossip and chatter and stare.

Clearly she saw his face, the sneer of the lips, the scowl of the brows, and the sombre, burning, steel-blue eyes. He seemed, from contemptuous survey of the congregation, her mother, herself, to look above their heads at the golden stone, the carved doorway, the chiselled cross, and the pinnacles like fingers pointing to high Heaven. She had a thought of menace, malediction, in the sudden gesture of his right hand. He thrust his hat down on his brows, and turned and leaped into the carriage, and closed the door with a crash. The coachman whipped up, and the carriage lumbered down the rough road for High Street.

As from a dream Hester was recalled by

Mrs. Carrick's level tone, "Now, my dears, are you ready? Helen! Helen Millard! Really, you are inattentive. Now, please!"

Hester watched the girls file, two by two, from the churchyard; Julia and the governess followed. Mrs. Carrick was saying calmly, "Hester, pray take my arm. You look pale as death, Hester. You will not swoon here, in the sight of all these persons and before the girls?"

Hester checked her impulse to satirical laughter. She whispered, "No, I'll not swoon, here. I'll make no scene—cause no scandal, here. Don't be afraid."

"Thank you, Hester."

In rose-pink and rose-white Mrs. Carrick's young ladies were passing down the road. The group of worshippers who had stayed to gossip on the fineness of the day, the quality of the sermon, and the singing, the fellow who had driven off in his glittering carriage with the absurdly dressed little girl: who was she?—drew aside for Mrs. Carrick, her arm, with show of affection, linked with her elder daughter's.

"Hester, don't you understand my thought, my feeling? This man Holtham, coming to the church, thinking only to parade himself before us, and to make me afraid!"

"Mother, can anyone, or anything, make you afraid?"

They had passed from the folk grouped about the church, and Mrs. Carrick withdrew her arm from Hester's.

"No one, Hester, and nothing, except scandal."

"Mother, the child, the little girl: she should be walking with our girls. She should be wearing white or rose."

"It is impossible that she be with our girls, Hester."

"Mother, I haven't weakened : I haven't changed my mind. The child should be at the school with me, near me. This must be, Mother."

"Never, Hester."

CHAPTER XIV

ROSA ANNE

HOLTHAM, in velvet jacket and plaid trousers, lounged on the couch, the smoke curling blue from his cigar. He watched lazily the little girl, perched primly on a high chair at the table. A bowl of almonds and raisins, a jar of Chinese ginger and a dish of summer fruit, with blue plates, silver knives and forks, were set upon the table, beside the decanter, water jug, and half-empty glass.

The windows were open, but the curtains drawn against the sunlight. Holtham saw with grim amusement the little girl's changes of expression in tasting ginger, from ecstasy to wonder, to pain. He saw her eyes swim with tears, and the colour mount to her cheeks.

"Why, Rosa Anne, what's the matter? You don't like ginger, is that it?"

"I did at first, sir," Rosa Anne whispered, half-choking, "but I don't now."

"Quite clearly," he said grinning. "Pour yourself a glass of water, child. Or spit the ginger out; don't stand on ceremony with me, my dear."

"Oh, no, sir; thank you, sir. I'm better now; I've swallowed it."

"Have some more."

"No, thank you, sir."

Holtham lay back on the couch, puffing his cigar.

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'sir', child. Why do you ?"

"Because you're a gentleman, sir," Rosa Anne said primly, "and Mrs. Wing, sir, she said we should always say 'sir' to gentlemen."

"Did she say why ?"

"Yes, sir. She said, 'Manners is money—so mind 'em, or you'll mind me !' "

"Oh, that's the reason. But the estimable Mrs. Wing deceived you, my dear. Manners do not mean money or money manners—in my case. Now you're to put Mrs. Wing out of your mind, and her house, and all she taught you, and all she did to hurt you and make you unhappy. Do you understand me ?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Rosa Anna assured him gravely. "But Mrs. Wing, sir——"

"Deuce take Mrs. Wing !"

"If you please, sir. But Mrs. Wing was most respectable and respected in the neighbourhood, and——"

"So she told you."

"Why, of course, sir. Very often she told us. But she went to chapel every Sunday, and she sang—oh, so pretty, sir—so loudly you could hear her above everybody else ; and nobody could pray like her at meetings."

"I suppose not," he said, frowning. "Mrs. Wing and her kind pray for profit, and confess themselves miserable sinners, in the hope that fools may reward them, if the Lord doesn't."

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, looking at him doubtfully.

"Oh, no matter, my dear," he said, laughing. "Mrs. Wing, I suppose, has to live, like the rest

of us. And loud prayers, and loud hymns, and amens, meant tea and sugar and a few odd pence from the charitable at chapel."

"Indeed they did, sir. And Mrs. Wing prayed so powerfully that there was often tea for me and the other children, with sugar, sir. 'The Lord will provide,' Mrs. Wing used to say, when there was no tea or sugar and she was going to meeting to get some."

"Ah!" he said, his eyes darkling; "and what did she tell you of yourself, Rosa Anne?"

"Mrs. Wing said I was shapen in wickedness," she answered deliberately, "and in sin had my mother conceived me."

He was intent instantly; he took the cigar from his mouth, and tossed it to the hearth; he stretched out his arms: "Come here, my dear."

She slid from the chair, and came shyly toward him. He drew her to him; his fingers stroked her curls. He said gently and earnestly, "Rosa Anne, listen to me. Mrs. Wing was a cruel and wicked woman. No, don't interrupt me—" at her fluttering protest. "You are to listen to me, and to believe that I am speaking the truth, knowing this Mrs. Wing and her class. There are many like Mrs. Wing. You did not, you do not, understand the cruel thing she said, the cruel lie she told you. You do not even understand her meaning. You are to promise me that you will put Mrs. Wing out of your mind, and all she told you. You are to believe that only because . . . because I wasn't able to help you, and to take you away from her, and give you happiness, you were with her for so long. You are to believe that your mother wasn't able, any more than I was able, to help you, and

have you with her in her house. But you are to think no wrong of your mother; you are to love the thought of her, and to hope that one day she will come back to you and me. Will you do this, my dear?"

She nodded, not looking at him; he knew her struggle with tears; he said kindly, "Now don't cry, Rosa Anne. There's no need to cry, any more than to be afraid of me, or to call me 'sir'. You are only to be happy with me, and to hope and pray that your mother will come back."

She whispered, "But . . . but isn't my mother dead, sir?"

"Did that woman tell you so?"

She shook her head: "No, but I always thought so."

His arms tightened about her thin shoulders. "She isn't dead, Rosa Anne. I think she will come back to you, if not to me."

"Oh, but, sir, where is she? Where?" And with a swift shrill cry, "Oh, she's not, she can't be, the pretty lady who was crying, when you took me to the school, and the cruel lady was unkind to you and me? That isn't she, sir?"

He muttered, not looking at her, "What makes you think so, my dear?"

"Because . . . oh, because."

"You saw the cruel lady and the pretty lady in church this morning, Rosa Anne."

"Yes, and when we were going out, and I fell against the pretty lady's best Sunday dress, she wasn't angry at all."

"Was she not?"

"Oh, no. She put her arm about me, like you, sir, now. Only more gently, and she smiled so kindly, and——"

"Rosa Anne, would you like to go to the school again ?"

"Not to the cruel lady, sir."

"But to the pretty lady ?"

She did not answer, staring at him round-eyed, her lips quivering. He released her ; he laughed harshly, and he said, "Now run away, my dear. Go and play with your doll in the garden. But put on your hat, for the sun's very hot."

"My best bonnet, sir ?"

"No. The wide straw hat. Run away."

She fluttered from the room, her white muslin dress billowing about her. He sat scowling the while, after the door was shut. He stretched out his hand, and filled his glass. He hesitated ; he raised the glass, as though to toss the spirit on to the hearth. The bells of Holy Trinity were ringing for the afternoon service. He lifted the glass to his lips.

CHAPTER XV

MONDAY

MONDAY morning, and Mrs. Carrick's Boarding and Day School for the Daughters of Gentlefolk to open at nine o'clock. Hester downstairs at daybreak. Sleepy maids and cross cook assembled under direction of Mrs. Loyne for the preparation of breakfast, the sweeping, dusting, and polishing of parlour, study, hall, and schoolrooms. The bell sounding awfully through the house. Twelve daughters of gentlefolk awakened to direction by Miss Corder, blinking drowsily behind her spectacles, suppressing yawns, and administering pettish rebukes to this or that daughter of gentlefolk. Assuring herself that twelve daughters of gentlefolk, ere descending the stairs, were washed, brushed, curled, and unimpeachable of blue linen dresses and white pinafores, that the twelve daughters were devout and decorous at prayers, read by Mrs. Carrick, black of gown, and placid of demeanour.

Miss Corder assisting Miss Hester in the direction of maids serving porridge, bread and butter, and cups of weak tea to twelve hungry daughters of gentlefolk, and ensuring that the table manners of the twelve adhered rigidly to the polite standard of Carrick House.

Twelve daughters of gentlefolk dismissed for recreation in the tree-shaded playground. Sounds

of gay voices and laughter through the open windows, and glimpses of blue linen, and white pinafores, and frills, and of curls and pigtails, dark or flaxen, tied in prim blue bows.

Half-past eight, and Mamma in her study: Miss Carrick and Miss Julia, silent and unseeing since the quarrel of Saturday evening, trim and slim in their white linen dresses; awaiting parents or guardians escorting new pupils to the school on this first morning of its year. Miss Carrick and Miss Julia resting, ere descending to the schoolrooms and instruction: Miss Carrick, geography, grammar (Lindley Murray), writing, history, and arithmetic to long division: Miss Julia, poetry (extracts from Sheridan Knowles's Elocution), music, singing, and the use of the globes. Miss Corder conducted the infants' classes. All this staff under the personal and direct supervision of Mrs. Carrick.

The sounds of gay voices and laughter from the playground grew louder. The clock struck the third quarter. Rat-tat-tat on the front door; the first of Mammas arriving with her daughter. Many Mammas following with their daughters. Miss Carrick and Miss Julia sharing with Mrs. Carrick the reception of Mammas and daughters. Polite greetings. Kisses to new and shy pupils. Frowns for pert or giddy pupils. Conduct or direction to schoolroom and playground. Trusts to established pupils: "Sarah, take care of little Catherine, won't you? Selina, go with Marion, and make her known to your playmates." Hester, with her smile, kindliness and sympathy, and gentle voice, winning immediate affection from tremulous daughters of gentlefolk: Miss Julia impressing Mammas

by her elegance: Mrs. Carrick overaweing gentlefolk and daughters alike.

Nine o'clock struck from the hall. The bell sounded on the tick of time. Shuffle and dance of feet, flutter and rustle of blue linen, white pinafores, and frills; laughter hushed by Miss Corder's sharp reprimand. "Helen! Helen Millard! Silence, I beg. Don't be so giddy."

Five and forty daughters of gentlefolk assembled in the main schoolroom, and ranged on the forms at the desks. The long, whitewashed room, scrubbed, map-hung, smelling of soap, oil, and a faintness of beeswax, with the windows open to the sunlight, and the sounds of the rustling leaves, and the thin perfume of flowers against the house wall—transformed from its colourless austerity to a garden—by the blue of linen dresses, the black, the brown and the gold of tresses, the roses of cheeks, and the brightness of eyes. Laughter and chatter silenced under the severe and spectacled eyes of Miss Corder, when Mrs. Carrick, attended by Hester, while Julia stayed in the parlour for the reception of straggling gentlefolk and daughters or wards, entered the schoolroom in state.

Mrs. Carrick made stiff acknowledgment of welcome and respect by five and forty daughters (of gentlefolk), summoned to their feet by Miss Corder's rapping the high desk on the platform at the far end of the room, and signal to rise and curtsy. Mrs. Carrick, rustling in silk and lace, her head high and arrogant, made stately progress to platform and high desk: Hester stood to her right, and Miss Corder to her left. Five and forty young ladies seated themselves at Miss Corder's permission: "You may be seated."

Mrs. Carrick, her right hand resting lightly on the desk, looked down on the schoolroom and the attentive faces, and cleared her throat slightly: "Ahem. My dear girls, let me welcome—" But her voice died instantly, and her pale face was touched with colour, and her eyes were angry in their gaze at the slowly opening door, and at the little figure appearing, white of face, round of eyes, solemn of look; the ridiculous little figure with the big bonnet tied in a wide bow under her chin, and her plaid frock bulging over her starched petticoats, and the frills projecting above high black boots; and the tiny parasol, and the shining leather satchel on her arm.

Rosa Anne stood hesitant in the doorway. At Mrs. Carrick's sudden silence and angry eyes, five and forty young ladies turned their heads; Miss Corder stared frankly and indecorously; Hester, with sick terror on her, was incapable of thought or action.

Mrs. Carrick recovered quickly. "One moment, pray, my dear girls. Hester! Please go and take this poor child from the schoolroom. Clearly, she has come to Carrick House, mistaking it for another school."

Hester, pale and trembling, glanced at her mother with blazing eyes, passed by her desk, and hurried down the room, followed by the eyes of the five and forty, and Miss Corder. She stooped; she kissed Rosa Anne, and she murmured gently, "What is it, my dear? Have you lost your way?" and she heard Rosa Anne answer faintly, "No, ma'am. Please, ma'am. Papa showed me to the gate, and said this was Carrick House, and I was to come to school, please, ma'am."

Hester put her arm hastily about Rosa Anne's thin shoulders, and whispered, "Hush, my dear. Hush! Come with me—" and led her to the door. With the door closed, she paused an instant, with quivering sense of disgust and resentment against Holtham: that he could have been so brutal to the child, and to her; and against her mother, that she could have turned the little girl so from the school. Pale as death now, tears starting to her eyes, she faltered, "Oh, my dear, my dear. You shouldn't have come here alone like this. You shouldn't have come at all." But at the little girl's blushes, trembling, and tearful shining of eyes, Hester controlled herself, and forced a smile and the words: "Come with me, my love—" and led her through the passage from the schoolroom to the hall.

Julia was coming down the hall. She started at the sight of Hester and the little girl. She asked in an undertone, "Who is this child, Hester? What is the matter?"

Hester, with her voice controlled like Julia's, yet her eyes flaming, and her face white with passion, whispered, "Can't you guess? Can't you think? Holtham's child. Mine. He sent her to the school, and Mamma has turned her away."

"Hester, what else could Mamma do? Hester, you don't mean . . . you can't——"

Still in the fierce yet controlled voice Hester answered deliberately, "I mean yes, I mean. I told you I was married to Holtham, married. And, I tell you, Julia . . . And this child is mine."

"Hester, you mustn't let her stay in the hall. Anyone may come and see her here. The maids, Hester."

"Julia, you're like Mamma: you only think of——"

"I think only of your good name, Hester," Julia said, in a tone of shame and fear. "And of our good name. Hester, for heaven's sake, send the child away. Send her back home. We must have time to think and plan. This will ruin Carrick House, all of us, Hester, if it's known."

Hester did not answer; she looked down at the little girl beside her. She said gently, "Come with me to my room, my dear. I'll put on my bonnet and shawl and take you home."

"Thank you, ma'am," Rosa Anne answered. "Yes, I want to go home, ma'am, but Papa, he said I was to come to school here, and he may be vexed if I don't."

"Don't be afraid of Papa, little one. I'll explain to Papa. What is your name?" leading her toward the stairs.

"Rosa Anne, if you please, ma'am."

"Well, Rosa Anne, I'm going home with you at once. Will your Papa be at home?"

"I don't think so, ma'am. He said he was going down the town."

Julia, at the foot of the stairs, murmured to her sister, "I'll take your class, Hester, till you come back. You'll not be long away, will you?"

Hester ignored her, saying to the child, "Well, little Rosa Anne, I'll wait at home with you till your Papa returns. I've many things to say to your Papa."

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONTRACT

HESTER put on her bonnet and shawl, while Rosa Anne watched her with solemn and admiring eyes. Hester chose a thick veil, but did not draw it about her face; she had no thought to avoid recognition by any parent of the pupils of Carrick House, or any friend or acquaintance whom she might meet, in conducting the little girl to the house on the New town Road. Her resentment against Holtham was dying, with quick intuition of his purpose: to force the child upon her mind, with the assurance always of the appeal to her: the lure.

To go to him; declare herself the mother of his child. Share his life. For the little girl's sake, but for no love of him; only the little girl!

She was conscious of the vulgarity of the plan: the selfish cruelty to Rosa Anne as emissary. Her anger was countered by pity for him, so clumsy in his plotting, and by the evidence, not wholly displeasing to her, of his confidence that she would intervene to spare the child humiliation, and his estimate that her interest, her affection, the possibility of her caring, if she faced her duty—surely her duty to her child—must mean infinitely more to Rosa Anne than Mrs. Carrick's harsh and arrogant rejection of her from the school.

Hester quelled conjectures. She knew decision impossible, till she met Holtham face to face,

reproached him, and heard his explanation and defence, and understood his motives truly. She turned smiling to the child; she said gently, "I'm ready now, dear. Come: I'll take you home."

And she held her hand, and led her from the room, and down the stairs, and through the empty hall, and out of Carrick House into the sunlight of the morning.

Though deliberately she had not veiled her face, she was glad that no one met her on the way to Holtham's home. She had no wish, no thought, in all her anger with her mother, to injure Carrick House and its reputation, by appearing openly, as yet, in escort of the child whom Holtham, by his appearance in the church, had proclaimed his daughter. She shrank still from challenge and defiance of Mrs. Carrick, Julia, and society. She shrank from contemplation of her true attitude toward Holtham.

She was conscious of a joyous tenderness at the pressure of the little gloved hand in her hand, and of Rosa Anne's smile, when she looked down at the child, and smiled at her. She was glad of the little girl's silence through the walk, down Argyle Street, and by the lane on to New town Road, and across the road to Holtham's house, high amid breeze-tossed trees and sunlit flowers.

She led Rosa Anne up the steps. She trembled to see Holtham standing in the doorway, and she coloured resentfully at his smile, or sneer, it seemed to her, and the gleam of his eyes. She loosened the child's hand; she nodded coldly to his bow, and muttered greeting:

"Good morning, Miss Carrick. I expected you

and Rosa Anne. I waited home from town for you."

She turned, and would have gone down the steps. He intervened instantly, stretching out his hand to stay her, and in a low tone begging, "Don't go, please. I want to speak to you. I beg you not to go."

She faltered sadly, "How could you do this? How could you let her go alone to my mother's house?"

She could detect no sneer in his answer: "Because I know, because I trusted, you to spare her from humiliation. I say because, I know you!—" his gaze intent on her. "I beg you to stay. A little while to stay, and listen to me. Hester! Hester!"

She whispered, trembling, "Hush! Send her away. Your servants?"

"You are afraid still. You were not afraid, bringing Rosa Anne home. You did not veil your face. No. No one will see you, Hester. Rosa, child, run to your room, and take off your bonnet and gloves."

"Yes, sir," Rosa Anne said, smiling, curtsying to Hester, and adding primly, "Thank you, ma'am, for bringing me home—" and sped away.

Hester's choking laughter and sobs were hysterical. "Oh, the poor little creature, the quaint little creature! How could you send her to Carrick House like that? How could you be so cruel?"

"I've told you."

"But in such a frock; in such a bonnet!—" her laughter hysterical still, yet dominant over sobs. "Man, man! How came you to choose such clothes for poor little Rosa Anne?"

He answered glumly, "I chose as well as I could, alone, Hester. I see nothing wrong with the bonnet. It's an expensive one."

"It must be, with such feathers," Hester said, struggling for composure. "And such ribbons. And such flowers." But she ceased to laugh, and turned her face from him at his retort, "The child should have her mother's care, Hester. I admit I'm not fit for the charge of poor little Rosa Anne."

At her silence, the aversion of her face, and her trembling, he said earnestly, "Forgive me. It was only my hope, Hester, only my hope."

"For the child alone ?" she asked ; he answered, "No. For myself first, and then for Rosa Anne. Hester, won't you come into the study, and listen to me ?"

She nodded ; for her faintness she accepted his proffered arm ; he led her slowly down the hall to the study. She sank to the arm-chair by the hearth ; he locked the door ; he asked, "Will you not drink a little wine, Hester ; you are faint."

She thanked him : No ; she must return presently to school ; her head would ache if she drank wine in the morning.

He stood by her, looking down at her in silence. She was conscious of his strength, as of his dark good looks ; the marks of his dissipation were not evident to her, as on the night of her first visit to the house ; she knew that he had not been drinking that morning. She fought desperately her doubts and fears and indecision, knowing his purpose to appeal to her, to leave Carrick House for his house ; declare herself openly his wife, and to break the old bonds, for him, and for Rosa Anne.

But ruin Carrick House: destroy all Mamma's work, and Julia's hopes of happiness?

He said at last, his voice husky, and his head bent, "Hester, when you came here the other night, I had the hope, in all my drunkenness, that I had planned rightly, from my knowledge of you, my memory of you, all the years ago."

She whispered faintly, "You told me, when I asked why you had brought the child to the school that afternoon, why—do you remember? You answered, insulting me."

He nodded, "I told you only I had acted in drink."

"Was that true?" she asked sadly. "Did you mean that? Or did you wish only to hurt and humiliate me? For you succeeded. You hurt me, humiliated me, cruelly, cruelly!"

He cried out with a fierce impatience, "Hester, when you came here that night, I had been drinking heavily. What I said then has no meaning now to me."

"Ah, but to me?"

"I say no meaning! I tell you that in the visit, the challenge to your mother, in bringing Rosa Anne to the school, as in sending her to-day, I had the one thought, knowing you, your heart, the goodness of you, to appeal to you, as no letter of mine appealed."

"Letter! I've had no letter," she said, starting, and trembling with the instant and resentful thought: her mother, always her mother, her unscrupulous and remorseless intervention.

"I thought not, Hester. And I was determined to reach you and appeal to you, as I had no hope for myself to appeal after my years of degradation,

shame, and call to life all that was sweet and generous and noble in you long ago."

"Long ago!" she repeated, listlessly and hopelessly. "Long ago!"

"Hester," he said, still gloomily regarding her, "I don't pretend; I think only to be frank with you at this hour, while I am sober; I don't pretend, I say that it was for little Rosa Anne's sake I took her to the school, and faced you and your mother, or sent her to-day. I repeat, I thought only for myself, to use her for myself."

"How could you be so cruel to the little girl?" she whispered; but, with sudden moan, and beating of her hands and intertwining of her fingers: "Dear God, that I should say this to you . . . to you . . . ! I who gave up my little one those years ago, and doubting, doubting she was dead, as they had told me, did not think, and did not search, and did not know, and dared not ask, only prayed secretly, that she might be happy . . . if she lived . . . might be happy. That I should say this to you, and reproach you. Oh, forgive . . . forgive!"

Hands groping now to touch her shoulders, eyes smouldering beneath his dark, contracted brows, he muttered, "Hester, I planned so for myself to bring you here, and then appeal to you, as humbly I appeal now to you. I am not given to humility, my dear. I vowed, long ago I vowed, that once, if ever, the prison gates were opened to me, and I was free, I'd not bow head again to God or man. I vowed I'd be my master, my own law, and my own god. Oh, I endured the years, when I was working in the chain-gang, day after day in the chain-gang, hewing, shaping, hauling, the very

stones that form the House of God upon the hill."

She cried out with tone and look of horror: "Trinity . . . the Church! Yesterday, your look, your menace, malediction: you had the thought, the memory of the quarries, that very stone. And you cursed Trinity and Heaven."

He sneered: "And do you censure me, Hester? Can you?"

"No," she answered. "No. But why go to the House of God only to mock?"

"Only to see you, Hester; only again to let you see our child; only to plan."

"Only for this!" she said. "Only for this? Only to mock, I say!"

He cried out, his look disordered, and clenched right hand uplifted, "I have no thought, no hope, in earth or Heaven, Hester, other than you. What hope, what hope enduring, strengthened me to bear the prison, the chain, the cell, even the lash, Hester, the brooding misery of the years, except you, Hester, you only? Ay, then, what hope, and now what hope, save only you? Love of you, Hester—my wife, Hester! Love of you from the days of hope and happiness, long ago. An eternity surely, Hester, Hester! My body had been broken but for you. My reason had been broken but for you. My heart had been broken but for you. You, if ever I were free . . . if ever . . . if ever, Hester. I have no belief in Heaven save through you. I have no hope of redemption, save through you, no hope of triumph . . . triumph . . . triumph still."

"Triumph," she whispered, shuddering.

"Triumph over cell and chain, the brand upon

me, body and soul upon me. Over the accursed prison; over the System; over England; over Fate. Over the hell symbolized for me, symbolized, symbolized——"

Shuddering still, she faltered, "What would you say? I am not afraid of anything that you may say."

"You are so pale, you tremble so!"

"Only for pity. Only for understanding, hearing you."

"Symbolized, then, in that high house, God's House, upon the hill, the stones, the very bells!"

"The bells!" she breathed. "They sound to me in beauty only, glory, praise of God."

Her voice broke; she bowed her head, and covered her face with her hands. His clenched hands sank to his side. She ended a long silence, sobbing out, "What is it you ask of me? To come to you as wife, to live in this house, to face life with you?"

He answered dully and hopelessly, "It was my thought, my hope, Hester, loving you so much, believing . . . believing through eternity, through hell! My hope might seem my madness, my obsession, yet remained my hope."

"And now your hope?"

"My hope no longer, Hester."

"Why not your hope?"

"Having heard me, of my life, those years, what they have made of me, you are ashamed of me; you sicken for the very thought of me, the convict. The creature of the chain-gang and Port Arthur. No. I have no hope, Hester."

She said lifelessly, "Yet I am willing to do this."

He was silent an instant; he uttered then a harsh

cry; he would have caught her in his arms; through no repulsion by her, through no shrinking of her from him, but as by sudden realization, sense of incredulity, he stayed himself, paused irresolutely, drew back, and now not looking at her, but leaning against the chimney-piece, his head bent low and his voice hoarse and broken, he said, "It can't be, Hester."

"I have told you," she said, still in that lifeless tone, "I am prepared to share your life. I am prepared to face the future with you, and try to help you to rebuild—restore the wasted years, the cruelly wasted years."

He muttered still: "Being saint, being above earthly, Hester . . . Hester!"

"Being your wife," she said. "Having vowed . . . through sickness, sorrow, till death, but having failed in my trust."

"Only in penance then, only in pity!" he cried out. "For no shred of love enduring—how could your love, any woman's love, endure for such as me? As I am now?"

She said, not raising her head: "I can pretend no more than you have pretended to me. I pretend no love for you . . . in my thoughts . . . love for you. My heart has seemed dead; my soul has seemed dead, as your soul, through these years. But I know a quickening in my heart, my soul. I know I love . . . must love, my little girl. And it is for her, chiefly, I am prepared to stay with you in your house. And for the memory of my love long dead. And all the torments . . . torments of my lover, through the years. And for the hope—" her voice dying.

He repeated, "The hope? The hope?"

She raised her head, and looked at him: "The hope to find my lover, husband, in you, as you were, and as you may be."

He held himself still remote from her; he said in a slow, thick tone, "Yet think well, Hester, for your own sake, think well! My ostracism, the brand on me, must affect you, my wife. You would know cruel loneliness and humiliation, as my wife."

She cried out, "Have I not known loneliness and humiliation all this while? What can I be called on to endure more than I have endured?"

"And yet, think well, Hester. Understand me as I am, the drunkard of the other night, the drunkard I may be."

"I have forgotten the other night," she said. "I ask your promise only, that you try to drink no more."

"I make, but I break, promises, Hester."

She did not speak; again her head was bowed, and her hands were clasped on her knees.

He turned and looked at her, his gaze direct and steadfast, and his voice hard and clear: "I make this promise to you, Hester. I shall contend, always I shall contend, for your sake, and for the child's, I shall hold you in high honour. I shall try, so far as ever an emancipist may, in this Colony to which he is condemned—oh, would that you and I and the little one might face life in a new country where no one knows us!—I shall strive to win repute by honesty and fair dealing. I promise that you shall lack nothing you ask of me. Always I shall worship you, Hester, as my saint, my guardian: guardian against myself."

"You can be as you were long since," she said,

looking sadly at him. "You can rise, as the very soul of your dead self."

He muttered darkly, "I do not fear myself: my soul I do not fear."

"Whom else should you fear now, husband—whom should you fear?"

He answered: "Not myself, I say. Not myself; but a devil that possesses me . . . out of the solitary cell, out of the darkness, the silence . . . out of the quarries. Hester, dear Hester, how I hate, I fear, the very sounding of the bells!"

She did not speak. She walked slowly to, and unlocked, the door.

He started forward; he cried out, "Hester, you'll not stay? You fear me, hate me too much to stay?"

"I did not say so."

"You go away to think calmly, and to decide?"

"No. I'm going home only to see my mother and my sister for the last time, and to pack my clothes and trinkets."

"Hester, I can send my servants for your boxes now?"

"No. I shall see my folk. I shall tell them."

"Let me go with you then, and face them."

She shook her head; she said, smiling palely, "No. I must have a little time to speak to them. It won't be before this evening. They and I will not be free from teaching till this evening."

"I'll drive to the gate for you. At what time?"

"About eight o'clock. Yes, wait at the gate, or come to the house as you wish."

He said dully, "You'll change your mind, and you'll not come back with me."

"At eight o'clock," she repeated. "Come for me then."

CHAPTER XVII

DUST OF CARRICK HOUSE

HESTER, in the pallor of twilight through her bedroom window, finished the packing of her boxes. Holtham's servants could convey them to his house next day. She would take with her only the leather case and the silken bag.

As she tied her bonnet strings, she was reflected ghostly from the dressing-glass. Reflection of dress and violet shawl was merged in shadow: her face seemed spectral and unreal, floating from darkness, and she had a sorrowful fancy that the memory of her would haunt her mother's house. She was inflicting irreparable injury on the school, and her mother and her sister. Almost her spirit fainted now, for the thought, the doubt, wherein duty lay? In the continuance of this secrecy for her mother's sake and Julia's, or in declaration of herself as Holtham's wife and mother of his child?

She had, in truth, no heed for herself. She was prepared for the inevitable ostracism from the Carrick circle on the revelation of her old folly, and her confession of her marriage with a convict. She had loved young Holtham to distraction, his good looks, his strength, and the evidence in him of a social status once matching her own, but thrown away through momentary rashness, the theft which had seemed only a loan, to be repaid

from visionary winnings at the Derby. She did not, could not, love this stranger, this dissolute, vulgarized, brutalized Holtham, the creature of the chain-gang and Port Arthur. She was afraid of him, and of the darkness and the wildness of his moods and speech, and his intemperance, and of their contrast with the decorum and restraint of the polite and narrow circle of her life, and their challenge to refinements and reticences.

She had cruelly in mind the episode on Trinity Hill: the intrusion of Holtham on her sanctuary, the beloved church, and the challenge, the malediction, against the carved Cross high on the belfry, his aspect, like a madman's, and then his admission of his hatred of that lovely, holy House, and of the cause, the labour with the chain-gang in the quarry whence the stone for the church was cut. His loathing and his terror of the bells seemed to symbolize the attitude of the man to all that she held precious and revered.

And yet he was her husband. And yet her duty lay to him—oh, surely, to him—by the very law of God. And yet she had loved him, loved him, in her thoughts of him in prison, and in her prayers she had offered humble and piteous intercession for him; yet his memory, his image, had dominated heart and mind all the years of his imprisonment. Only with his release and reappearance had she feared him, shrunk from him, and the seclusion of her life in Carrick House, the safety of her colourless life, had seemed very dear to her.

She took her wedding ring, hidden so long in her little writing-desk, and set it on her finger. She put on her gloves. She told herself that her

duty to her husband and little Rosa Anne compelled her departure from the house.

Indeed, with the thought of the child she was no longer hesitant. She took the case and the silken bag, and went down to the hall. She had not spoken to her mother or Julia since her return from Holtham's house. She had gone about her duties, had taken her classes, and presided at the midday dinner and the tea of the girls; accounting it happy that the work of the first day in the school year had engaged Mamma and Julia equally with herself: she had not been in contact or conflict with them.

She set the case and bag by the foot of the stairs, walked to the study door, and knocked. She received no answer, and turned to the parlour. On entering, she was confused at finding Marley with her mother and Julia, and she would have drawn back; Mrs. Carrick, seated by the hearth, pale and weary of air, and yet seeming strangely elate and triumphant, said instantly, "Don't go, please, Hester. Only Mr. Marley is here."

Hester advanced slowly, curtsied to Marley's bow, and said, "How do you do?" conscious of a subtle distinction between the young man's normal manner to her and the slightness of his salutation now.

Julia reclined on the couch. She did not glance at, or speak to, her sister; she made leisurely play with her fan. Marley stepped forward to set a chair. Hester thanked him, but stood by the hearth, and said gently to Mrs. Carrick, "May I speak to you in the study, please, Mamma?"

Mrs. Carrick's gaze was direct and chilling. "No, Hester. If you have anything to say to me,

there is no reason why you should not say it before Mr. Marley."

Hester glanced at her sister and Marley; from Julia's aversion of her face, and from Marley's aspect, Hester suspected, rather than saw, his sneer and air of hostility; she knew on the instant and with relief, if with confusion shown in distressful eyes and hot colour in her cheeks, that Marley had been told her story. Her mother had known her purpose to join Holtham, after the rejection of the child from the school, and had forestalled scandal; or Julia, in her cold honesty and candour, had insisted on confession to her lover. Hester did not speak; she drew her shawl about her shoulders, and walked toward the door.

"Hester, you are leaving my house to join that man?" Mrs. Carrick said quietly. "Am I right?"

"I'm going to my husband and my child, Mother, yes," Hester said, not looking back, yet pausing. Marley had stepped forward to open the door.

"Before you go, Hester, I say this only to you, that Mr. Marley has been made acquainted by your sister with the story of your alliance with that man years ago."

"I guessed this, Mother."

"Julia has told him all, by her own wish, and with my approval."

Not looking back still, but standing with bowed head, Hester murmured, "All, Mother? You are sure—all?"

"All, Hester!" Mrs. Carrick answered, in incisive and inflexible tone. "Mr. Marley has acted with very great generosity."

"Not generosity, Mrs. Carrick," he interrupted,

bowing. "How could this affair affect my admiration for Julia, or my respect for you?"

"All, Mother?" Hester repeated, with sad, satiric smile.

As not heeding her, Mrs. Carrick said calmly, "Not generosity, then, Henry; thank you for correcting me. But with spirit and manliness, certainly. Your sister will be happy, Hester: you need not add that reproach at least to the burden of your sorrow, as I assume it to be, Hester; as I care to assume."

Hester did not speak. She stretched out her hand to open the door; Marley would have forestalled her; Mrs. Carrick continued slowly and deliberately to speak, "Injury to Carrick House, to its good name, is inevitable, I know, Hester, though Mr. Marley has assured me that his family's social prestige, and his own, will be exercised on its behalf and mine, and that the truth shall be made known to Sir William and Lady Denison, to society generally. I fear that you will suffer, Hester, by your association with that man, suffer cruelly; but, at least, you alone will suffer by your own choice and your own folly. You recognize, Hester, that just as you are excluded from the society of your sister and myself, you must be cut off from the circle natural to you by birth and class, if not by inclination, Hester. You recognize that from to-night we are not likely to meet—we cannot meet again?"

Hester said, still with that wan, satiric curl of lips. "I recognize this, Mother. It could not be otherwise. It is necessary to the prestige of Carrick House, and you, and Julia, and Mr. Marley."

"It is your own choice, Hester."

She was impelled to sneer, "But, for prestige, prestige, better that you disown me!" But she checked the impulse; she said quietly, "It is my own choice, Mother!—" and nodded to Marley to open the door.

She did not trust herself to speak further or to loiter; she thought to say, "Good-bye, Mother, Julia—" but no sound issued from her lips. No farewell followed her. Marley closed the door after her.

Blindly she sped to the foot of the stairs; she took up leather case and silken bag, and walked to the house door. On opening it, she cried out faintly to see in the light of the lamp Holtham on the steps.

"Hester, are you ready?" he asked eagerly, baring his head swiftly, and taking the case and bag from her trembling hands. "I've been waiting for you."

She swayed weakly towards him; instantly he clapped his hat on his head, and put his arm about her.

"Hester, you're sick; you're swooning. What have they done to you? Hester, don't shrink from me. Don't be afraid of me, in Heaven's name!"

She clung to him; she whispered weakly, "Oh, be good to me; be kind to me."

"Why, always, always, Hester!"

"Let us go quickly! Let us go!"

She was conscious of his strength, and of the close and kindly pressure of his arm about her shoulders. She was conscious of the darkness, closing in on them, as they went from the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BELLS

ALL the years in Hobarton Hester had loved the bells of Holy Trinity on the high hill, as she had loved the Sabbath services; the silver voices of the bells had filled her universe with beauty, even as the prayers, the sounding of the organ and the voices in the psalms and the hymns, the placid or the tragic glory of the Testaments, the plaint, the passion, the agony, the high hope, and the serenity, of the Scriptures, had filled her starved mind with splendours, and had offered solace to her spirit in all its loneliness, its sorrow, and its despair.

Through all the time of her separation from Holtham, since her father's death and the transfer of the family from Richmond to Hobarton, she had led a colourless and narrow existence. The very waning of her beauty, her pallor, the sorrow of her eyes, and the dullness of her hair, had symbolized the withering of earthly hopes, joy and passion. Controlled by her mother's cold and remorseless will, a very prisoner, she had not understood how few the years separating her girlhood, her love and her folly, from her middle-age, the futility, the weariness, and the hopelessness of her existence in Carrick House. She had grown wan and haggard, and had seemed a dull and conventional spinster, without other attraction than her gentleness and resignation. Not elusive

beauty, but dignity, kindliness and sympathy in her, realization of her goodness, had won Guard as her suitor.

She had seemed to the Carrick circle unattractive matched by Julia, vivid and elegant and exquisite. Her young womanhood had been spent through the years of Carrick House in waste as sheer as the years of Holtham's servitude in the chain-gang and in the prison at Port Arthur.

Only the sounding of the bells had been woven like silver thread through the drabness of the days. Only the Church had lent dignity to the garments of life, and had inspired her hopes from earth to Heaven, and from the dragging years towards Eternity.

She grew soon, in her husband's house, mystically to consider her response to, and Holtham's rejection of, the glory of the bells, as symbolic of their lives and natures in conflict: her enduring hopes and his moods of black despair. For, always, she hoped, as always she responded to the bells, and the thought of their sounding like her prayers and aspirations to High Heaven. Always she hoped with the years, and with a recognition of her purpose—only to redeem, only to re-establish Holtham—to compel him on the life of Hobarton as honourable, high-minded, redeemed, and from the shame and ruin of his youth purified, cleared of dross, refined like precious metal from the furnace, resolute of manhood, and triumphant over the degradation and debasement of the hateful prisons at Port Arthur.

Hateful! Hated by all Tasmanians, all free-born Colonists, except the covetous group profiting from the contracts with the prisons—the group

profiting by the cheap labour from the transportation system—the official and the military caste about the Governor, the satellites of Government House, and the supporters of Sir William Denison in policy. Hateful—and near an end.

She had not heeded, in the seclusion of Carrick House, the coming triumph of the Anti-Transportation League, the end to the iniquities of transportation, the concentration on the Colony of England's criminals, the arrival of the ships with their cargoes of rogues, and political offenders, and victims of social privilege and abuses. She had followed her mother and Julia in adherence and loyalty to Sir William and Lady Denison. She had classed the Patriotic Six with the Irish Exiles: she might have thought John West and his League to resemble the rebellious Americans of the past, but for the thought of Holtham and Port Arthur.

Dear Lady Denison: dear Sir William! But these dreadful people who dared to disagree with the Governor and oppose him in the Legislative Council! Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, worshipped with the polite fervour, if the sense of remoteness, of a deity. Dear Earl Grey, standing no nonsense from the rebellious Colonist, and asserting that England had the right to send convicts, or not to send convicts, to the Colonies as she wished! Why, of course! How Mamma had defined the law of loyalty to the Governor and the rights of Downing Street!

But, if socially, the Governor and his Lady and their circle had been living entities, politically they had been shadows to Hester. She had not understood the strength of the Tasmanian opposition

to Downing Street and its officials: the struggle, the greatness, and the triumph, of the Colonial cause. She had not understood the recognition of its justice by the finer minds of England. The Derby Ministry had meant nothing to her, or the significance of the Colonial rejoicings over the retirement of Grey from administration, or the influence of Pakington as Secretary of State for the Colonies, or the reform, the abolition of transportation, projected by the Derby Ministry, and carried to effect by the Aberdeen Ministry, through the Duke of Newcastle in the Colonial Office. In her mother's house she would have accepted the official notification in the *Gazette*, of May, 1853, as the triumph of the disloyalists over dear Sir William.

She learned swiftly and clearly from Holtham. She thrilled to his enthusiasm. She welcomed his active share in his appearance on the public platform through all the rejoicings of the Anti-Transportation League and its adherents. She welcomed his absorption in the Cause, though she feared excitement and its effect upon him, the recoil to his dark moods, the stimulus of the brandy bottle.

She had agreed—her spirit prompting candour and a brave face to society—to public declaration, from the platform, of his term of servitude in the chain-gang and at Port Arthur. She had known her instant social ostracism, on the publication of her marriage years before with her father's assigned servant, the secret of the marriage, held so long, and the birth of little Rosa Anne.

She wondered dully by what means her mother had been represented as a martyr to her daughter's

wickedness and folly. She did not care to credit her or Julia with falsehood and the blackening of her name. She conjectured the influence of Marley's sister at Government House. She heard through Lade and Guard of Lady Denison's visit to Carrick House, and of the invitation to, and the appearance of, her mother and Julia at the next ball at Government House. And of the continued prosperity of the school, and of the marriage of Julia to Henry Marley fixed for the close of the school year. And of the Marley influence against her husband and herself.

She had high courage. She did not shrink from, rather, she influenced Holtham in, the boldness, not the effrontery, of their appearance before the society whose code she had outraged, and from whose circle she was remorselessly excluded. She induced him even to accompany her and little Rosa Anne to the first morning service in Holy Trinity after her departure from her mother's house. She had no thought to challenge, or to inflict humiliation on, her mother and her sister. She thought only to continue her religious life, to follow its observances, and to seek strength and courage from the beloved Church on the hill.

She was acutely conscious of whispering, averted faces, or contemptuous stares, as she and her husband and the child walked from the carriage to the church. She bore herself resolutely, with her head high, and her face unveiled, though her hand trembled on Holtham's arm. She had the thought or the fancy of new splendour in the music of the bells, and of call to courage and duty in the crying of the bells. She thrilled to the pride of the bells, the glory of the bells. She was glad of

the sanctuary of the church, the solace of its peace, and the consolation to her spirit from her prayers. She was assured of a Divine beneficence about her.

She was glad that Holtham, the child, and she, were ushered into a pew remote from the pews of Carrick House. Across the aisle she was aware of the appearance of her mother, her sister and their charges: Henry Marley was with Julia, as though to declare publicly his allegiance to her, in spite of the disgrace of her sister's alliance with Holtham. Hester was glad of this, for Julia's sake. She turned her eyes from her mother's proud, high features, from Julia's lovely head, from Marley's dark youth, and from the neat bonnets of the daughters of gentlefolk. She glanced down at little Rosa Anne, in her new and simple bonnet, and her white muslin frock, and she smiled at her, and saw the instant answering smile. She knew Rosa Anne was everything to her, and the Carrick folk nothing.

She looked at Holtham; his arrogant, powerful features, his darkly-shadowed eyes, and his contemptuous lips. She wondered faintly whether the slight stoop of the broad shoulders, in spite of the firm set of his head, was only imagined by her; the stamp of the prison no more than from her knowledge of his servitude in the chain-gang and at Port Arthur. She bent her head in prayer.

Strengthened from the austere beauty of the service, and the diversion of troubled thoughts and fears through the association of the church, the dearest associations of her life at Carrick House, she faced, with dignity and composure, the worshippers lingering about the doors of Trinity. She

knew the group at Carrick House to be drawn up as usual beside the door. She did not glance aside, but leaning on her husband's arm, with little Rosa Anne clinging to her hand, she walked slowly toward the carriage. She did not look back as they drove away. She smiled faintly at Holtham's laughter, though she was affronted by her sense of the vulgarity of his thought: "They hate you, those women, Hester, for they're jealous of your looks. In your lilac gown and silk shawl, you're lovelier than any woman among them. There's not one but would give her soul for your beauty. And not one would give her soul for the silk and the jewels you're to have, my dear."

She checked him, shaking her head, and glancing at the child. He sat beside her, whispering compliments to her good looks and her elegance, and to her courage, and promising, promising: she must drive down the town to-morrow; she must choose new dresses, and new bonnets, jewels, anything she wished for. She sat remote and silent, shrinking from him, and still afraid of him, as of none of his enemies, none of her own foes or detractors; her lips smiling faintly, as she listened to him. She murmured her thanks; yes, she needed new dresses, but not expensive ones; jewels, she was too pale for jewels. He told her, with laughter, that he was the better judge and he would spend as he liked on his own wife.

He spent extravagantly from the first days of her restoration to him. She was afraid of, but lured inevitably by, lovely shimmering stuffs and dyes and fashions, and by jewels. She avoided plaid for walking dresses, and chose taffeta or foulard. She considered too youthful her choice,

directed by his insistence, of a silver tarlatan, ornate with sprays of velvet roses bound with gold cord; indeed, she had not the courage, or occasion, to wear the lovely ball dress. She insisted on the severity of black silk, or of grey satin, if she attended concert or play with him in the evening.

She took pride in his gift of a grey silken mantle trimmed with chinchilla, and a Paisley shawl, a necklace and ear-rings of pearls, and a set of amethysts. She would accept no showy jewels, such as he urged; she guided his extravagant generosity to this beauty of pearls and the pale hue of amethysts.

Always, in driving out in the carriage with him and Rosa Anne, or at entertainment, or at church, she displayed elegance in her dress, yet an austerity of taste. From loveliness of faint colours, in bonnet, shawl or scarf, and harmony of jewels, the restoration of her beauty, as her grace and dignity, was impressed the more on envious or admiring eyes. The colourless and fading Miss Carrick, of Carrick House, seemed transformed; as Holtham's wife, she appeared in the maturity of beauty.

She knew, yet she ignored the evidence of, her ostracism, and the scandal associated with her and Holtham, the averted looks, the furtive smiles, the whisperings and the titterings, at any entertainment, the cold eyes, and the blankness of expression among the members of her mother's circle. She had consented instantly to Holtham's announcement of their marriage: publication in the *Gazette*, with the date of the wedding in Launceston. She knew from Holtham, who had learnt it through Lade, that her mother, credited with ignorance

of the affair, was considered to have done her duty to society by her rejection of Hester on her discovery, only after Holtham's release. Hester only was censured: she had averted scandal, it was said, by placing her own child with foster parents all the years ago. She was stung by this, but she allowed no challenge to the slander: Lade and Guard might know the truth, but no one else.

Holtham and she must share in no bitter quarrel, or increase or incite scandal. Only by silence, only by display of pride and dignity, to the little world of Hobarton; only by unflinching courage and confidence, only by absorption in their little daughter, only by ignoring slights and sneers, could they hope in the end to triumph. Ostracism was nothing to her. She had lived apart from life for years. She asked no other thing of life than freedom for her duty and her love for Rosa Anne.

She professed no love for Holtham. Inevitably and inexorably, from the first days of their reunion, the memory of her young lover, John Holtham contended with the reality of her husband; this emancipist, of dark and gloomy will, in conflict, or in accord, with the passions imprisoned all the years; the courage and the fineness of him, devotion to his wife and child, counteracted by the vice, the terror, the very protest of spirit as of body against the hell of chain-gang and of penitentiary. She came swiftly to understand the warped, marred being; this conflict of the spirit with the degraded body dragged down to a very pit of shame and torment: this creature of the System in conflict for his soul.

Coming to his succour, with all her courage, quiet strength and faith, she grew with pity to

fear only for himself, yet helpful, watchful, she found no restoration of love, no affection, and no esteem.

She knew that his devotion to the child matched her own devotion. She believed the hope of ultimate redemption in his love less for herself than for little Rosa Anne. Her own love of the child was absolute; her happiness with the child sufficed for life. She took delight in her companionship, in her play, and in her school hours. She trusted Rosa Anne to no other teacher than herself. Else, she ruled her husband's house and its servants, and directed its routine, with efficiency, as with dignity. She received his few guests with charm and grace: his lawyer, his partner, fellow-merchants, and captains of ships. Guard stood loyal and steadfast always by her, in spite of the frustration of his own hope of marrying her. Lade treated her with kindly courtesy and respect; his daughters called on her, defying society. Guard's mother paid a stiff and stately visit. The incumbent of Holy Trinity made his pastoral call.

She received no other guests. Yet she found no loneliness in her life at the great stone house, rich of furniture and glorified by gardens; rather, her life was purposeful; her mind was devoted to Holtham, and her heart to Rosa Anne.

Little, white, Rosa Anne. If Hester trembled, if her heart sank for the thought, the fear, of Holtham, with the stamp of the Broad Arrow black upon his spirit, she found courage and hope less in his passion for her than in his love of the child. If ever her spirit flagged, fainted, before the dark mood, the melancholy silence, and abstraction, his absence from the house without word of

explanation to far into the night, or the mad merriment telling of drunken bouts, she found sanctuary, solace and new strength in the shadowed beauty of Trinity, and the voices of the bells.

And from their house of golden stone upon the hill the bells acclaimed the glory and the mercy of the Lord: now in the beauty of sunlit morn and noon; now to the heavens radiant with moonlight or hung with the tapestry of darkness and white stars; now through the silence and the hush of eves when no breeze was abroad, and now triumphant over the sounding of the great winds from the seas, and the rolling of the thunder across the skies; even through that great autumn storm which smote the port, and wrecked its proudest ship, and laid the house of Walham in the very sand, and bowed* the proud head of its mistress as for an impious challenge to Heaven; how the bells sounded on that dying storm!

And always to the sounding of the bells, always to their beauty and their splendour, the soul of Hester answered; always to their chiming on the Sabbath morn, she made her way to Trinity; always the spirit of the sanctuary of God stilled fear, and doubts and terrors, purified, and ennobled. Always her husband accompanied her, as though boldly to face this house of stone, shaped by his hand through months of torment, and to face and challenge Heaven, as he faced and challenged life and man.

She had this pitiful thought and fear, watching remotely the darkly-brooding face, the tortured lips and the melancholy eyes. Never he bowed his head in prayer or worship; never he shared

*"And all that beauty."

in singing, intercession, or response. She grew to fashion fear on fear. Challenge to Heaven still, or evidence demanded and exacted of the beneficence of Heaven? Little Rosa Anne, her sickness, life or death? Holtham's increasing bouts of drunkenness.

CHAPTER XIX

MERCHANT: SHIP-BUILDER

THE afternoon was bright and sparkling, with a touch of frost still in the air; the breeze was light, and Mt. Wellington was crowned with snow. The snow, deep in gullies and declivities, down its slopes, was silver from sunlight, and by contrast with the sombre blue-black of forest and crag. A faintness of fog was held against the mountain at its base.

Holtham, returning from the shipyards on Battery Point, heeded the dancing silver light on the river Derwent and Sullivan's Cove—the masts, the spars, the rigging, of ships great and small, and the flutter of flags. The abolition of transportation and the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Colony would be celebrated on Wednesday; he knew the flutter of flags to be the prelude of display from the harbour, as from the city itself.

His lips were grim and cynical at the thought of celebration: the irony of public rejoicing that no transport ship again would enter the harbour; no prisoners again be dumped on the lovely island to provide cheap labour for great estates and small, and for stately dwellings, and for public works, and to fill the prisons of the Peninsula and the East Coast: the irony that the very death blow had been levelled even at Port Arthur, with no new supplies of wretched humanity to fill its cells,

and employ its guards; the irony that right had triumphed—too late for John Holtham!

From inspection of the shipyards, and the progress of the new schooner for the Eastern and Island trade of Guard and Holtham, he had not returned by way of the Battery and the New Wharf, but had walked back past the Walham house, thinking to call on Miss Rose Walham. Rivalry in trade of the port, projected by him and his partner against the Walham firm, implied no gratification, but only the liveliest sympathy with Rose Walham in the loss of her ship, the *Smyrna*, with all hands, during the great autumn gale; the loss, from scandalous report, was dual: the ship and Lone, the young mate thought to have been Rose Walham's son. Holtham, following practice through the past months, had called at the shuttered, shadowed house, had inquired for the health of its mistress, and had left a card, with a message of sympathy, on the answer that she was not yet well enough to receive visitors. He had walked on, with a cynical thought that the great lady, in her pride and power, would not have received the emancipist at her house, and yet with pity for her, remembering her beauty and distinction, in his few business interviews at her office before the disaster.

He walked about St. David's Burial Ground, by Davey Street, to Murray Street. He stood hesitant at the corner on the choice of a way to his office, but he resisted impulse toward the Customs House Tavern, and turned up Murray Street, past the Gaol on his left, and the Colonial Secretary's office on his right, toward St. David's, and into Macquarie Street.

Fashion of Hobarton was abroad. The yellow sunlight struck upon colours, and the little breeze ruffled and swayed bonnets and ribbons, shawls, and immensity of skirts: yellow sunlight on rose and grey and blue, on hideous richness of plaids and checked foulards, the grace and delicacy of Cashmere and Paisley shawls; glittering and sparkling, too, on the polished metal of harness, and the glass and brass of carriages; on the scarlet and steel of sentry at the gates of Government House, the high, latticed and patched cottage in gardens to his right, and the scarlet and steel at the Guard house.

The air sounded with the clit-clat of horse hoofs, and the rattle of wheels of elegance and fashion, and the lumbering of teams of industry. He turned his head at the sight of the carriage leaving Government House, on recognizing Sir William Denison's broad, grim face, and Lady Denison's lively and good-humoured features. He continued past Elizabeth Street toward Hunter Street. Again he checked impulse to enter a tavern, but only at the sight of his own carriage, drawn up before his office, understanding that Hester waited to accompany him home from town. His lips sneered for the thought of her purpose to prevent him from visiting any of the Elizabeth Street taverns on his way home.

Through his walk down from Macquarie Street, among merchants, lawyers, clerks, officials, and women of fashion, none had offered him greeting or salutation. He had been grimly conscious of averted eyes. He knew himself notorious, for his enrichment on his release from prison and receipt of a conditional pardon, and for the

revelation of his alliance, as assigned servant, with Hester Carrick.

As for this habit of drunkenness growing upon him.

In normal mood, he would have ignored the sense of his ostracism. Now morbid of mind, sick and depressed from the effects of deep drinking the night before, and drinking with the more reputable water-side fraternity that morning in the Phoenix Tavern, he allowed a dark storm of rage and hate to roll upon him, as black squall upon the breeze-whipped river. He stood staring up the sunlit street, his gloved hand clenched on his Malacca cane; his eyes malevolent, and his thought despairing, as ever in the days of chain-gang or of Penitentiary; with all his wealth, with all his love of Hester and their child, in spite of all his struggles against drunkenness, and his aspirations for honesty and clean living, he could not hope, in this accursed city, in this Colony to which his conditional pardon restricted him, to rehabilitate himself, hope to rise superior to his past. His spirit was fettered—loaded with chains, as ever his body during penal servitude.

He swung about, narrowly averting collision with a drunken seaman, reeling from the supporting arm of a lean, ferret-faced fellow. Recognizing this escort, Holtham halted, and gazed sternly at the colourless face and the flickering eyes, and muttered grimly, "At your old tricks, are you, Begg? Hoping to empty this fool's pockets of his ship's pay, are you?"

"Not me. Not me, Mister," Begg whined, shrinking from him. "I was only seein' he come to no hurt nor harm. Knowin' crows as would pick 'im dry to his bones."

"If you didn't yourself," Holtham sneered.

"I tell you I'm a friend of his, Mister. I tell you," Begg asserted. "A real true friend."

"No one would be in your company, Begg, if he weren't as drunk as this flat," Holtham said, contemptuously. "I give you warning: if this fellow's robbed, and goes to the police with his tale, I'll see that you suffer for it, that's all."

"Now look," Begg snarled. "Now look here, Mister 'Oltham, as was Number 99 at the Tench, when I was——"

"Off with you!" Holtham roared, with threatening wave of cane. "Off with you, I say. I've warned you." And he turned his back on seaman and wharf-rat, and strode to his office.

He pushed open the door, and marched in; he ignored the clerks at their desks, and without knocking, thrust open the green baize door into his partner's room. Huge, great-coated, hat on head, he stood in the doorway scowling. In his evil mood he did not control hateful and jealous thoughts: Hester sat in the arm-chair by the hearth, her head bowed, and her hands clasped upon her lap; Guard stood by her, his head bending toward her; his look at Holtham, thrusting into the room, seemed startled.

Holtham hated his good looks, his air of distinction in demeanour and dress; for an instant he did not speak to his partner's greeting, "Well, Holtham—" or Hester's soft cry, "So here you are, John! I was afraid——"

He bared his head, approached, and stooped to kiss her. He muttered, "What were you afraid of, my dear? That I'm still not to be trusted out of your sight or company?"

"I didn't say so, John," she protested, with a faint smile, though she did not look at him; he knew that the stale smell of spirits was on him still, and that she shrank from his kiss.

He drew back and glanced at Guard, leaning against the chimney-piece: he struggled to control ill-humour and outrageous suspicion. He muttered, "If there's nothing you want to discuss with me, Guard, I'll drive home with Mrs. Holtham now."

"Well, a few letters from Sydney and Melbourne have come in," Guard answered. "Nothing of importance. Nothing I can't hold over till the morning. How are they going along at the shipyards?"

"Well enough. They'll have her off the slip in a week or two."

"We'll have to celebrate the launching," Guard declared. "Our first schooner, you know. I've no doubt at all of the name you'll have her christened."

"'*Emancipation*'!" Holtham sneered.

"Scarcely suitable, I think," Guard said coolly, moving to his desk, a heavy cedar piece richly in keeping with the deep carpet, easy chairs, and the gleam of glass, the fine prints, and the tall brass candlesticks.

"What is your idea, then, Mr. Guard?" Hester asked.

"Well, really, Mrs. Holtham, your name."

"You want that, do you?" Holtham growled aggressively.

"I assumed, naturally, Holtham, you'd choose that name or *Rosa Anne*," Guard said, affecting to ignore his ill-temper. "*Rosa Anne*, shall we say? What do you think, Mrs. Holtham?"

"I think that would be charming," she said, but with a sigh, "Poor little Rosa Anne."

"Where is she?" Holtham asked, with instant change of mood. "Why is she not with you? Sick still?"

"She seemed to be feverish, John," Hester answered. "I thought I'd better not bring her with me. The air is cold out of the sunlight."

"Did you see the doctor?" he asked uneasily. "He ought to see her at once, oughtn't he?"

"I thought we might drive up to his house before going home, John, and ask him to call this evening."

"We'll go at once, Hester."

CHAPTER XX

THE INEXORABLE PAST

HOLTHAM had gone down with the doctor to his carriage. Hester stood by Rosa Anne's bed. A fire burnt brightly on the hearth; the room was lit with candles on the chimney-shelf, and the night-light was set ready on the table beyond risk of danger to the muslin curtains of the four-poster.

From Rosa Anne's dark curls outspread on the pillow, her face seemed of a waxen whiteness; her eyes were bright and feverish, but her lips smiling. "The doctor," Rosa Anne declared, "is a nice gentleman."

"Do you think so, Rose child?" Hester said, smiling wanly.

"Oh, I'm quite sure, Mamma."

"You haven't tasted his medicine yet, dear, so you really don't know, do you?"

Rosa Anne appeared to reconsider. "No, I haven't," she admitted. "But I know he is nice, though his medicines are sure to be nasty."

"You don't even know that, child."

"Oh, but I do. Medicine always is. Mrs. Wing, she——"

"Dear, don't talk of Mrs. Wing," Hester checked her gently. "I've told you to forget her."

"But I can't, Mamma."

"Oh, yes, you can, dear. By not thinking of her, and not speaking of her. You won't see her

again. She can't hurt you any more. Try to understand this, Rosa Anne."

Rosa Anne regarded her gravely. "When am I to take medicine, Mamma?"

"Papa is sending one of the servants for it, darling. You needn't take it to-night, if you're a good girl and go to sleep. You may be so much better in the morning you'll not need to take it at all." And leaning forward, and stooping to kiss the child, "Mamma will pray that you'll be better in the morning, Rosa Anne."

"Mrs. Wing always said——"

"Darling, please!"

"Oh, but, Mamma, you'll laugh at this. Do let me tell you! May I?" Her eyes bright with excitement.

"Very well, if you'll try to sleep after."

"Mrs. Wing always said grace before she gave us medicine. She said, 'For what we're about to receive, Lord, make us truly thankful—and you drink it up to the last drop or I'll skin you.' But she didn't take any medicine herself. And the Lord didn't make me truly thankful, Mamma."

"Didn't He, Rosa Anne?"

"No. He always made me sick."

Hester laughed, kissed the child, said, "Well, try to sleep now, my dear. I'm going to tell Martha to sit with you till you do."

"Are you going out, Mamma?"

"No, not now."

"Because of me?"

"Partly. But more because I'm very tired, child."

"Are you going to waste that pretty frock?" Rosa Anne asked, blinking at Hester's grey satin

gown, the silver bracelets at her wrists, and the amethysts at her ears and throat.

"It won't be wasted, Rosa Anne. You've seen it already, and so have Papa and the doctor. Good night, my dear, I'll send Martha to you."

She lit the night-light, blew out the candles, and went down to the study. She rang for a maid, Martha, middle-aged, gaunt, grim of aspect, but devoted to the child, and directed her to sit for the while by the fire in Rosa Anne's room, and to call her, if the little girl did not sleep.

Holtham came in from the garden. Hester was startled by his troubled look. She asked hastily, "What did the doctor really say, John? He doesn't think she's seriously ill, does he?"

He stood before the fire, not looking at her, seated by the table. He said heavily, "He can't say. That's the truth of it. He says he'll call to-morrow morning. He thinks it may be only a severe cold, but she shouldn't be as feverish as she is. It would be nothing in the case of a healthy child, but he wonders at her thinness and weakness. He asked me questions, many questions."

Hester said, trembling, "You mean—of course you mean, the child was so much neglected and ill-treated; half-starved all the time she was away from me, John. She's so weak, in spite of all we have done, or can do, that any illness must be dangerous?"

He nodded: "Naturally, Hester."

She did not speak; she sat with bowed head; her eyes brimmed with tears.

He said, "Dr. Crowther has warned me of the child's weakness. It's been plain to you and me for weeks. She needs constant care, if she's to outgrow

it, and not to go into a decline, child as she is. I assured him of your devotion to her: I told him of all you've done to make her happy and healthy since my release and your return to me. He knows our story, Hester. He's guessed more than he's been told. He said that your mother was much discussed—bitterly discussed, for her treatment of you, and the separation from the child. You acquit me of having talked about her, I trust, Hester?"

"You needn't ask that question, John."

"I think the woman Wing or one of the old Richmond servants to be responsible. Crowther was perfectly frank with me. His conjecture is that not you, or even I, Hester, but your mother, even your sister, must be responsible for this treatment of you now, after the rejection of you: this hostility to you. It's clear to Hobarton; it's clear to all the folk of Trinity every Sunday. Well, your folk are blamed: Guard is openly your advocate, Hester, whenever he moves in society, Crowther tells me. Guard's influence is counting against Marley's, and Marley's sister's. Hester, he tells me, that with our story known, really known, our love and marriage long ago, and all our sufferings since, and the little girl's sufferings, we'll not be shut out from life by decent folk in Hobarton longer than we choose."

She said simply, "I'm glad for your sake to think this. It has been my hope. But if it's true, that it's hurting Mother and Julia, I'm sorry, John. I can't help feeling sorry. Always I've known that if only you'd have patience, and hold your head high, and be known as honest and generous, and sober, John, you'd outlive the past. You'd rise,

as others have risen, out of the past, and all its shame and evil."

He turned and watched her with haunted eyes. He muttered, "The past will never be wiped out, Hester. The shadow will not be lifted. I may aspire, but I shall not attain."

She said earnestly, "I have a greater faith in your strength, John. I have a deeper belief in the justice of Heaven."

His laughter was rasping and mirthless. He said dully and slowly, "Hester, when I'm lying abed, and nightmare's coming on me, and I know danger, terror, is coming toward me out of the darkness; a black shape rushing on me out of the darkness, I know, or dream, that for life and reason, I must stir and rouse myself, but I can't move hand or foot, or compel my will and body. And the terror rushes on me, and envelops me, and I struggle desperately, and I cry out, and I wake sweating for fear. I've thought of late that life is like the dream, the nightmare, the horror coming on me."

She said faintly, "What horror should come on you now, John? What have you to fear of life? You have known all its tragedy. You cannot suffer more. You're rich: you're living honestly; honourably if you will. You'll be respected, loved, if you will."

"Hester," he said, with livid look and tone of agony, "The arrows and the chain, the torment, torment, all those years in the prison; their reformatory: all that I suffered, all the years that my body and my spirit were in hell, are still upon me and my life. They're on my mind, my heart. They'll not cease to torment me;

they must destroy me slowly, dragging me down, till I am in my grave. Hester, I've known such shame, such degradation; I have been a lost soul among lost souls; I have thought again to move on earth among men, and in the light of day; I have striven, always I strive, always I think to fight and conquer destiny, and on the past to build the life of a man. Hester, can I build on the brim of the Pit itself? Does Hell offer to me foundation for the structure of new life? Hester, I know the life that you and I have planned only the structure of a dream. I know the brink crumbling. I know the horror rising to engulf me, my life, my house of life."

She shuddered; she was silent, and did not look at him.

"Hester, if you'd loved me, if you could have cared as long ago you cared, not shrinking from me, with fear of me, and loathing of me, for what I am, and what I must remain; all my life left from the prison I must remain: if you had come to my house for any love of me, for any pity even, I might have known, imagined—and taken courage from imagining, I was not wholly lost: I could rise. I could be other than the creature fashioned, not by will or purpose, or old hereditary sins, shaping my nature. Fashioned, distorted by Port Arthur. The Tench, the chains, the lash: shamefully fashioned, degraded, warped and destroyed. I might have triumphed, as I hoped and planned to triumph. If you had loved me, Hester."

She whispered piteously, "Yet I may love again as once I loved."

"Do you believe this, Hester?"

"I pray this, husband."

"Always you're honest with me, Hester, Hester."

"Always I seek to be," she whispered. "It was my compact with you, was it not? My compact: always to try to help you, and encourage you, and face life with you."

"But for no love of me, Hester."

"For no love that is," she said, her head bent, and her hands clasped on her knees. "Only for love that was, and well may be again, John."

And at his silence and the aversion of his eyes from her, "I have a thought, belief, of strength in your will, your nature, John, beyond your own estimate, or confidence in yourself. I am so weak of will and faint of heart that I can add nothing to your strength. I can help you only, I pray this, by my companionship, poor as it is, dull as it is, so that you may not think yourself as alone, more than any soul among us is alone; so that at least one spirit, caring, hoping to love, in your triumph over life again to love, may be with your spirit in this darkness, John, or in the life to be. For I care—so much I care!"

"For me, or for the memory of me?" he cried out; she hesitated an instant: unfaltering then she said, "For the memory of you, John, and for the hope of you."

"Hope! No hope."

She said, "The child's being sick, and your fear for her; is this why you're in so dark a mood? Is this why you're talking so to me?"

"No. Not wholly, Hester. Her sickness, weakness, and the possibility of losing her, I count only in the sum of life. Hester, through all the years out on this island I've retained a pride that

cannot brook, endure, the sneers, the contempt, the averted faces, when I walk among men."

"But you said, you told me, your hope, just now."

"Only for you, Hester. I shall walk always in the sight of men as though I wore the black and yellow rig, and the arrow and the letters. I'll be known always as the lag, Holtham the lag, notorious for the little sum I stole, and for the punishment, and for the ring, your ring, Hester, and the chain-gang, and the Tench. I'll be known, Hester: always they'll turn their heads from me; always they'll laugh and jeer, for the very money that is mine; always they'll sneer at the child, the lag's girl; they'll sneer, they'll sneer!—Hester, the prison brand is on my body and my soul. Hester, the arrow's in my heart!"

She cried out in pity and terror for him: the agony of voice, distortion of his face, and eyes and lips tormented, "I pray Heaven to be merciful to you and me, John."

"Hester, I think I hear the bells."

"In triumph . . . to the glory of God."

"Tolling . . . tolling!"

CHAPTER XXI

MESSAGE TO MRS. CARRICK

LADE was to dine at the house on Friday evening. Hester, through terror of the dark mood on Holtham, and the certainty that he was drinking heavily again, wrote a letter to the lawyer, begging that he would come early to the house: she was anxious for his advice, and for the exercise of his undoubted influence over her husband.

She hesitated to depart from her practice of calling for Holtham at his office, and driving home with him, to prevent his visits to the Elizabeth Street taverns on the way. She found excuse for Holtham, before he drove down to his office that morning, that she did not care to leave Rosa Anne: the child was still feverish, and in bed. Her cough seemed to be worse. The doctor was not satisfied with her progress. He received her explanation moodily, but, she believed, with relief.

She dressed early for dinner, so that she might be ready to receive Mr. Lade. She thought to spend the hour, before he might be expected, in reading a fairy tale to Rosa Anne. She wondered at the knocking at the house door, as, in her grey gown, she was about to enter the sick room. She walked to the landing, and, listening, she was astonished and confused to hear her sister's voice.

Julia at the house! Hester had had no word or sign from Julia since her departure from Carrick

House: leaving the church on Sunday mornings, she had not glanced at her mother and sister and the pupils.

That languid drawl to the servant: "Is Mrs. Holtham at home?"

"Yes 'm. Come in, please, 'm. What name, 'm?"

"Miss Carrick."

Hester stole into Rosa Anne's room. The little girl was lying quietly, with her arm about her doll, and did not hear her mother enter the room. Hester crept out, and on meeting the maid coming up the staircase, she said, "I heard Miss Carrick, thank you, Martha. Look into Miss Rosa's room from time to time please, in case she needs anything while I'm downstairs."

She believed that the explanation of Julia's visit lay in the social reaction of which the doctor had spoken to Holtham. She entered the parlour, cold and composed of features, and fully conscious of restored beauty, in spite of her pallor and the heaviness of her eyes, from anxiety of the child's illness and of Holtham's dark mood, and absence from the house night after night. Julia had not sat down; she stood in the centre of the room, appraising, Hester believed from her air of detachment, the austere beauty of furniture and decoration, of soft chintzes, of ebony, rosewood and glass, and curtains of old brocade. She was dressed with fashion, a note of rose in gown and bonnet; her grey cloak was trimmed with squirrel fur.

They stood an instant in silence, Julia's languid gaze meeting Hester's calm gaze. With rippling laughter, then, Julia greeted her sister, "Well, my love?"

"How do you do, Julia?" Hester said stiffly, advancing.

Julia bent forward, offering to kiss her. Hester ignored this, and colouring slightly, she moved past her to her chair by the fire, and pointed to the chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

"Won't you sit down, please?"

"Hester," her sister said, standing by the chair, and surveying her with calm eyes, "I suppose, sooner or later, you expected to see me at your house?"

"I can't say that I expected, or hoped, Julia," Hester answered quietly. "I thought that by joining my husband here, I cut myself off from your society and Mamma's. I understand better why you did not come to see me, or write to me, or recognize me, when we met at church, than why you should visit me now, or should pretend any affection for me."

Julia laughed and sat down. "Oh, you poor darling," she said languidly. "As though Mamma would have been endurable, if I'd dreamed of doing anything of the kind."

"So she does not know now," Hester sneered. "You've waited till her eyes are off you, and you've stolen away, and come to see me without her knowing. That may be quite clear to me, Julia, but still I don't understand why you came at all."

"Hester," Julia said, with swift change of manner, "I don't pretend I'm here with Mamma's knowledge and approval. Still you may or may not believe me, but from the moment you left the house, I've done my utmost to persuade Mamma to come and see you, or to let me come. Oh, I haven't been thinking of Carrick House. I haven't

been troubled by any hurt you might have done or might do to the school, because those snobs and frumps disapprove of your doing your duty, and going to your husband. I knew that was right, however wrong and foolish you were as a girl, simply throwing yourself away."

"Pray remember, Julia," Hester said stiffly, "you're speaking of my husband."

"And pray give me leave, Hester," Julia said, "to be perfectly frank with you, whether I'm speaking of your husband or to you. Give me credit at least for a little affection for you, and——"

"I've had cause to doubt that, Julia."

"Why, yes," Julia conceded. "But do let me tell you now, Hester; do let me speak! May I? Thank you—" at Hester's sullen nod. "Hester, I suppose, in my way, I really care as much for Harry Marley as you must have cared for . . . for your husband, though, only thinking of you as you were at Carrick House, prim and shy and dignified, I couldn't credit you once with caring at all. You remember what I said, don't you?—the silly things I said to you that Saturday night. And I suppose it seems just as remarkable to you that I can care for Henry as you care for . . . for your husband. I suppose Henry seems to you rather ridiculous; conceited and snobbish: my dear, I know quite well he is. He's been made too much of all his life. He's always been so rich. He's been taught to think himself better than anybody else, and to be prouder of his family's being English, than of his father's coming to Van Diemen's Land as a younger son, and scapegrace, I think; and building up that wonderful place in the Midlands. Yes, I know all this, and when

I'm married to him, I intend to prove to him how clever a school-marm I am by teaching him—well, otherwise. But, Hester, Hester, when you told me about . . . about your husband and the little girl, and the secret marriage all those years ago, I was so much afraid, because I really care for him so much, love him so much. Does this sound ridiculous to you, because you think Henry ridiculous? It isn't really, Hester. I couldn't bear the thought of loss, any more than I could bear deceit of him, by not telling him at once, Hester."

She had spoken swiftly and nervously, colour in her cheeks and light in her eyes showing an emotion with which Hester had not credited her. She glanced swiftly at her sister, and at Hester's silence and air of remoteness, she said softly and simply, "I think, Hester, you should understand this, loving as you must love."

Hester's pride contended with her sense of weakening, and of affection. She said, though more gently, "Still, I don't understand, Julia, why you come now."

"Hester, it's because I've wanted from the first day to come to see you. Because I've wanted you to understand you weren't ostracized—isn't that the word?—I mean separated, cut off, from my heart and my affection."

"But you've not come near me till now, Julia."

"No. Oh, not because of Mamma. I hold my own always with Mamma. But I was afraid still of Harry, and his disapproval. I was afraid of his mother's influence over him, and his sister's. Oh, how I dislike those women, Hester! How I'll delight to put them both in their places, so

soon as we are married! For I know now that Harry cares for me more than he really cares for them. I know, because I'm here with his approval."

"That is very good of him," Hester said with a bitter smile.

"Oh, no, it isn't, Hester," Julia assured her. "It's because he's learning that if he really wants to marry me—and he does—he must do as I wish. Last night, Hester, I told him that I was going to call on you, and when he argued, I quarrelled with him. I gave him back his ring. I said I'd never marry him. So, of course, he consented. That doesn't sound very flattering to you, my love."

"It sounds rather insolent, Julia."

"Hester, my dear, please to remember that he is only in the process of reformation. When he's married to me, and I'm in charge of him, he won't be quite so much a gentleman."

"No?"

"As a man!" Julia added, nodding and laughing. "Well, Hester, you asked me why I came to see you."

"Because Mr. Marley has given you his gracious permission to do so."

"But that's not why, Hester."

"I've asked you several times, why, Julia."

She said earnestly, her head high and her gaze clear and direct, "Because I care for you, Hester. Because I know that you're finer, greater, than Mamma or Henry, or myself. That is why I'm here, sister—and to ask you to forgive me."

Hester stretched out her hand; Julia rose instantly, stooped, and kissed her, half-sobbing, half-laughing, and crying then, "But oh, my dear,

I mustn't stay. I don't dare to stay yet, because of Mamma; I think she suspected where I was going, after school; I'm sure she did. She was so satirical."

"Are you going to tell her, Julia?"

"Of course I'm going to tell her. But I'm going to tell her, too, that it's her duty to call. Harry and I will tell her. You'll receive her, won't you?"

Hester said calmly, "No, Julia. I'll not receive her, if she comes here."

"You can't forgive her?"

Withdrawing from Julia's arm, Hester said, "Any hurt she has done to me, yes, I forgive her. Or any hurt she has done to my husband, he and I would forgive her. But not the hurt she has done to little Rosa Anne."

"Oh, the little girl. Where is she, Hester? May I see her before I go?"

Hester answered, "Yes, come and see her. She's very ill, I think. Come and see her, so that you may tell Mother what she has done."

CHAPTER XXII

INTERVENTION OF MR. LADE

JULIA, subdued of aspect, had left the house. Rosa Anne had not stirred during the sisters' visit to the room; neither had spoken, looking down on the white face framed by the dark curls: neither had spoken till at the house door Julia had said quietly, "I should have come to you before, Hester. Yes, I shall tell Mamma of your little girl's illness, and your message to her." And had kissed her sister, veiled her face, and hurried away.

Hester stood in the porch looking out on the pale sunlight through the clouds of the August afternoon. The garden beds were dug; the leafless rose bushes and the shrubs were clipped and trimmed, red buds showed on the japonica; violets blurred the borders, and narcissi bloomed palely. Faint perfume rose on the cold and heavy air.

Julia had not crossed the road ere Lade, great-coated, muffled, and high hatted, appeared in the gateway. He came briskly up the path, bared his head at the sight of Hester, climbed the steps, and, shaking hands with her, said, "I had your letter, Mrs. Holtham, but I found no opportunity for an answer earlier than myself."

She thanked him: it was good of him to spare so much of his time to her; she was anxious to consult him before her husband returned.

She assisted him with coat and silken scarf, and led him to the warmth of the parlour, and sat down by the hearth facing him.

"Am I wrong, Mrs. Holtham," he asked, "or did I see Miss Carrick leaving the house, just as I walked up to the gate? I have a reason for asking; it isn't idle curiosity, I assure you."

"Yes, Mr. Lade. My sister was here to see me."

"She hasn't been here before, has she?"

"No, this was her first visit."

He nodded, adjusted his spectacles, and eyed her narrowly: "Now, Mrs. Holtham, what is it, please? Holtham and his conduct toward you, I suppose?"

"If it were only that," she said quietly, "I shouldn't speak of it even to you, Mr. Lade."

"Quite right, my dear," he assented, "oh, quite right. Still, Holtham, though not his conduct toward you?"

"Mr. Lade," she said, leaning forward in her chair, "I know that you are a loyal friend of my husband's and mine. I've heard him speak so often in praise of you, and with respect for you, that I was encouraged to write to you, and beg you to come here early to-day. Have you seen my husband recently?"

"Only to-day, to be exact," he told her.

"Had he been drinking?"

"H'm, yes. He wasn't drunk, but he was wild in his speech and manner. I happened to meet him in Macquarie Street, as I walked down from the Stone Buildings. He seemed to me to try to avoid me. Please believe me, Mrs. Holtham, I don't want to decry your husband to you in any

sense. I answer your questions only through my regard for you and your husband, and from my desire for your mutual happiness."

His stiff and precise manner was countered by his kindliness of tone; she said quietly, "Nor, Mr. Lade, would I discuss my husband with anyone, even with you, in spite of my confidence in you, and your friendship for him and me, but for my fear, not for myself, my fear for him. He'd been drinking. I knew this. He has been drinking for days. He has been away from the house night after night. He has been in a mood that is not strange to me. I knew well, before I decided to share his life here: he was honest and frank with me—I knew the danger, and the problem."

Her voice trembled; she covered her face with her hands; he intervened hastily. "Mrs. Holtham, please don't distress yourself by telling me, for I understand, I think, the problem and the danger. Shall I state the case, as it presents itself to me? Thank you. Holtham is, in no sense, naturally vicious; rather, he's of a fine and proud nature, a generous disposition. But there was he, a lad of good family, brought up in wealth, or the show of wealth, undisciplined and extravagant, only to be defrauded by his guardian. And finding a clerkship impossible, foolish enough to attempt quick enrichment by embezzling, borrowing, then, the money from his employer to bet at the Derby. His punishment was bitter: his transportation, his degradation to the companionship of the scum of English prisons. And he's landed here, and assigned to service, like a slave. And finding in you new hope, new opportunity, and loving you so very deeply, I think selfishly, possibly, but yet

without material aim—I'm sure you . . . you only, counted to him, Mrs. Holtham."

She whispered, "Yes, I know this."

"Mrs. Holtham, in your hands his reclamation, his restoration to society, would have been easy at that time."

She murmured, sadly, "And I failed him, through my weakness and folly, as a girl."

He shrugged his shoulders. He said with a curl of lips, "I do not hold you responsible, Mrs. Holtham, for your husband's tragedy. I was well acquainted with your father; I'm well acquainted with Mrs. Carrick. The responsibility was theirs, not yours, for the gross injustice inflicted on Holtham then, the new degradation of the chain-gang, the torture to a young man of his nature and upbringing, the brooding sense of wrong, which induced, compelled, his outbreak, and brought on him the sentence to Port Arthur. Mrs. Holtham, that punishment, the System, the severity of the discipline, are calculated to break the spirit of the most hardened of criminals, and Holtham was neither criminal nor hardened, whatever his quality of spirit."

She whispered, shuddering, "How must I seem in your judgment, Mr. Lade, and in the judgment of our world, for keeping silence all that time!"

"I judge you from my knowledge of your parents, Mrs. Holtham."

She said, in a lifeless monotone, "They told me, they convinced me, that he had tricked me; we were not married; the marriage was not legal. They told me he was thief and liar. They were so confident and strong, and I so ignorant and weak and silly—and so much afraid—that had I

tried to go to him, in his prison, or to give evidence for him at the trial, I couldn't have escaped from them. I couldn't . . . I couldn't!"

"There isn't any need, Mrs. Holtham," Lade said, "to distress yourself like this, only to defend yourself to me."

She nodded, and stayed her tears. She faltered, "I say this, Mr. Lade, not in defence of myself—it is too late, but to assure you that I had no thought, that the ring found in his possession, and declared stolen, was my own gift to him. If I had thought, I would have spoken. I would have given evidence. I learnt this only long after, from my father's restoration of the ring to me. And then I asked him: was this the ring they'd charged Holtham with stealing? He answered that it was not the ring. But I knew that he had lied to me, fearing me; he had cause to fear, he and Mother, for then, even then, I would have declared the truth. I would have dared to save him. It was too late. He had been sent from the chain-gang to Port Arthur. It was too late! But now, Mr. Lade, but now . . . isn't it possible for me still to prove the truth? Still to clear his name of all, except that folly in London? Show the gross injustice to him, the unmerited suffering?"

He shook his head: "I fear not, Mrs. Holtham. I fear not, without new and gross scandal. Your mother gave no evidence at the court. Your father is dead. Who would remember now whether this ring was the ring which figured in the prosecution of the convict? And the open challenge to your mother, and to your father's memory, would inflict injury only on yourselves."

"But as I know my husband, Mr. Lade," she said,

"and as you have interpreted him to me—the ruin of him and his spirit and his manhood—you, knowing as I know, that the horror of the past is on him, and that all his wild moods, all these fits of drunkenness, are entirely due to the wrong and degradation of the past. The shadow of Port Arthur is on him still. Is it nothing to me and to him that he should be cleared at least of this ?"

"My estimate of Holtham," Lade said, "is that he would not allow this course of action. He would not have your name, and his, the old folly, the old scandal, then, dragged before the public, in the mere hope of proving—what could it prove, Mrs. Holtham ? That he, transported for embezzlement, was not guilty of stealing a ring ! That he should not have been in the chain-gang from which he was sent on to Port Arthur—for striking an overseer ! No ! I beg you to give up the idea, Mrs. Holtham."

"But why should I do so, Mr. Lade," she said bitterly, "to spare my mother, or to avoid new scandal for the old ? I wouldn't have spoken of this—I wouldn't have brought this up—but for a ray of hope that it might benefit my husband a little, just a little. Had there been hope, in your opinion, the merest glimmer of hope, I should have urged this to my husband, and to you. I have no wish for a new and bitter quarrel with my mother, whatever the consequences of her actions to mine and me. I begged you to come early to the house, Mr. Lade, to tell you all my fears—you have confirmed them—for my husband, my knowledge of his sufferings in the past and now, and to ask for advice and guidance. As you spoke of him just now, you interpret him truly, his struggle

against Fate, and his attempt to face life boldly, and to build again. And so facing life, yet all the while his spirit tortured by the sense of shame, knowing himself notorious, branded, in spite of all his wealth and his courage, and his hope and will to do right; just to recover self-respect, and to make himself honoured for my sake and his little daughter's. And I'm not wise enough, clever enough, Mr. Lade, to help him more than I try to help him. I don't know what to do for him, except stand by him, and face life with him. I know I'm failing. I know it's because I'm not fine or strong enough, though it's my heart's wish: it's my one thought, except little Rosa Anne, just to help him. Oh, Mr. Lade, what can I do—what should I do?"

He answered instantly, "No more than you are doing, Mrs. Holtham."

"And failing!"

"Mrs. Holtham, this mood, this return to drink, may be only a passing phase. I cannot say, of course, but I think his reclamation and reinstatement to society will be your recompense yet."

"You don't speak with confidence, Mr. Lade."

"I should!" he asserted. "I know a change in popular opinion in your favour and his. This very visit of your sister this afternoon is evidence."

"It was without my Mother's knowledge, Mr. Lade," Hester said. "My Mother seems our enemy, and all her social influence directed against us."

He said, with a show of satisfaction, "But, Mrs. Holtham, you may expect Mrs. Carrick at the first opportunity to make a gesture of her forgiveness of you, and reconciliation with you."

Hester looked at him with hard resentful eyes.

"Dear Mrs. Holtham," he said, "you have a powerful ally, the most powerful ally you could have in Hobarton."

"I don't understand you, sir."

He went on, with chuckling laughter, "I dined at Government House last night. I dislike dining with the Denisons, with Sir William swelling with majestic indignation at the Colony, and the abolition of transportation, and his opinion of us as so many rebels. Sir William, but for his good breeding, would have given us the deuce of a rating even at dinner, about next Wednesday's celebration. But Lady Denison was charming and witty and laughing secretly to herself, as ever, over Sir William and his opinions, and the troubles into which they'd led him with Downing Street and the Council. My belief is that she's delighted with Downing Street's decision. In the drawing-room she questioned me about you and your husband, Mrs. Holtham. I took the liberty of telling her your story in full, and your courage, and his. She was pleased to say that your devotion did you honour, and deserved the restoration of your husband to society: she must have misunderstood Mrs. Carrick."

"She called on Mother," Hester said, "soon after our marriage was announced in the *Gazette*, Mr. Lade."

"Yes. With the clear idea of showing sympathy with Mrs. Carrick," Lade said. "She asked now whether your mother was reconciled with you. I—ah—outlined the facts to her. She declared her purpose to call on Mrs. Carrick this afternoon—this estrangement should not continue. Dear Mrs. Holtham, Lady Denison intends, out of her

kindness and her understanding, to help you. I need not stress the importance of her—ah—patronage, now—I dislike the word—her interest in you, and your husband."

Hester did not speak; her lips curled slightly.

"You asked my advice, my dear," he said kindly. "It is to meet your mother on any approach Lady Denison may suggest to her, and to stress to your husband the definite evidence of social re-establishment."

Hester said sadly, "Mr. Lade, he's torturing himself with thoughts and fears for the little girl. She's delicate and she's ill. Through years of cruelty and neglect. My Mother stands guilty in my husband's eyes and mine. And if . . . if little Rosa Anne shouldn't get better——"

"Put the sad thought from your mind, my dear."

She shook her head: "If she shouldn't get better, what of him, loving the child, as I love the child? What of him? What of me?"

CHAPTER XXIII

EYES OF SOCIETY

WITH the relieved thought that the doctor that morning had pronounced Rosa Anne better, though she must be kept from risk of chill and should stay in bed, Hester was prepared to follow Lade's advice to face society boldly in Holtham's company, with the assurance of Lady Denison's intervention on her behalf. Holtham had spoken casually of their accompanying Guard to the theatre this Saturday evening. The performance by amateur players was in aid of a charity, and would take place under the patronage and in the presence of Sir William and Lady Denison. Novelty would lie in the choice not of play and farce or opera, but in scenes from *The Lady of Lyons*; *Rienzi*; *William Tell*, and *The Heir-at-Law*. The talent of the players, ladies and gentlemen of Hobarton, their power in heroic verse, and their gift for gay comedy, were questionable, but the attendance of society was certain.

Hester, though she shrank from the ordeal of appearing before society, with its knowledge of her history and his, now urged their attendance. Guard would be with them; Holtham need not be concerned for Rosa Anne; the child was getting better; she would be sound asleep for the few hours of their absence. Let Guard dine at the house, and drive down to the theatre with them.

Holtham agreed, with a show of boisterous good humour which made her afraid, knowing him to be drinking heavily. After Lade's departure on the Friday evening, he had left the house without explanation, and had not returned till long after midnight. She had told Lade of his mysterious absences, and of her fear of old and undesirable associates from the Port Arthur days. Lade had promised discreet inquiry.

Holtham's failure to return home from his office early that afternoon, to drive out with her as was his custom, increased her anxiety. She welcomed with intensity of relief his arrival toward dinner time in company with Guard. He did not offer excuse for his absence during the afternoon, and she asked none. She suspected that Guard had sought and found him in a tavern, and had induced him to return home. Holtham was in a heavy mood, but not drunk. Shaven and dressed for dinner and the theatre, he showed no sign of drink upon him, and he drank nothing at table.

Hester had chosen for the theatre her grey satin gown, with amethysts, and for the chill of the August evening, her mantle bordered with chinchilla. Her fair hair was covered by a little cap of lace net, the pointed lappets exquisite with minute and brightly coloured silken flowers. She carried a delicate painted fan of silk and sandalwood. She accompanied Holtham, massive in greatcoat over broadcloth and white linen, to say good night to Rosa Anne. The child was dozing gently, and their visit to the room did not wake her. After murmured orders to Martha to watch closely, lest the child wake, Hester went down to the hall with Holtham. Guard awaited them;

the carriage was drawn up at the foot of the steps. They were driven away to the theatre.

Hester, chatting lightly with Guard, and pretending elation in the prospect of the theatre, watched her husband with anxiety still—the melancholy, brooding aspect, the heavy eyes, the sneering lips; he did not address her or Guard during the drive, sitting, remote and abstracted, with his arms folded, and his chin upon his breast.

The way was obstructed by the block of carriages before the theatre. Hester, peering from the window, saw dimly through a drift of grey fog, the yellow light of lamps from shops and taverns and a blur of faces; she heard confusion of voices, laughter, shuffle of footsteps, rattle and creaking of wheels and trampling of horses. The carriage moved slowly on its way toward the theatre steps. She averted her eyes and shrank back, sad and affronted by the faces, spectral and distorted through the contest of lamplight with fog, aspects of misery and shame, leering faces, covetous faces; the lane between the tavern and the theatre was crowding with the folk of the poverty-stricken and low-lying area along the rivulet.

Hester heard riotous sounds from taverns to right and left; she knew that, like every hotel or tavern in Hobarton, these houses carried on an extravagantly profitable trade with the lucky diggers visiting, or returning from the Goldfields to, the Island. Riotous sound mingled with all this murmur of voices, this laughter, and the shouting of coachmen. Hester noticed that her husband had roused himself from his deep abstraction; she heard his harsh laughter.

She clung to his arm, when, from the carriage,

he and Guard were forcing a way for her through the crowd about the lamp-lit steps of the theatre. She was glad when they were climbing the stairs in light and colour, but she was confused instantly, and was afraid, on recognizing—mounting the stairs before them—her mother and Julia escorted by Henry Marley. Her grasp tightened on Holtham's arm; she heard his dull laughter.

Nerving herself, she followed her mother and Julia to the mirrored cloakroom to right, while Holtham and Guard turned to left to leave great-coats and hats. She was glad that the room was crowded—she did not try to make her way, obstructed by immensity of skirts, toward a mirror. Her mother and Julia did not turn their heads. She drew back toward the head of the stairs, and there awaited Holtham and Guard. Society climbing the stairs, in colour and with animation, with fashionable inflation of skirts, shimmer of silk and satin, sleekness of furs, garish dyes of shawls; contrast of broadcloth and starched linen with motley, scarlet and gold, rose slowly toward her and enveloped her.

She was glad when Guard forced his way to her side. She thought, or imagined, through her confusion in this assemblage, that her husband was making his way down the stairs. She saw chagrin and concern in Guard's look, as he muttered, "Pray, take my arm, Mrs. Holtham." She moved beside him through the open doors and in the train of society, not heeding his swift instruction as he handed the tickets to the door-keeper; not realizing, as she was ushered with him nigh the shadowed, dimly-lit wall, and up and down steps, the nature of Holtham's choice of seats;

she faltered, in the gleam of light striking between curtains of crimson and gold, on understanding that he had taken the upper box to right of the stage, and that, but for the shadow of the curtains, she must face openly the society of Hobarton in its colour, beauty, array, frippery, and pomposity.

She retained self-control. She did not avoid the brightness of the light from the candles and the lamps. She stood an instant in the front of the box, with an air of composure looking down upon the theatre and its audience: the blur of society below her, the blur of faces upturned to her, the blur of heads and shoulders, of tinted caps, of feathers, and the glitter of jewels; and of faces clear and intent in this crescent of colour to her left and on either side of the Governor's box with its draped flag, its bouquet of flowers, and its gleaming brass rails.

On seeing her mother, Julia, and Marley, shown into the box facing her, she sat down, a little in the shadow, and of Guard, seating himself in the chair at the back of her chair, she asked in swift, low tone, "Did you choose so prominent a place, Mr. Guard, or did my husband?"

"He wanted this box," Guard answered. "He paid extravagantly, generously, urging support of charity."

In an undertone she complained, "You should have prevented this. You should have considered the ostentation, and the humiliation to me."

He answered earnestly, "I argued this with him, but he insisted. He's reasonable, as a rule, but he's not been particularly so of late."

She was averse from discussion of her husband even with Guard, and she knew his distaste to

resemble her own, but she was impelled by anxiety to whisper, "He's gone to one of the public-houses now, hasn't he ?"

"Yes, I fear so."

"Couldn't you have prevented this ?"

"I tried to, of course. He grew angry, and there were others listening, Marley among them. I was compelled to make a joke of it, in his own interest."

"You should have gone with him, and watched him."

"He wouldn't have me with him. He was determined to be alone. He told me to take you to the box."

"Will you go and find him presently ?"

"He promised me he'd return before the curtain rose. He's in a strange mood, a dangerous mood : I think well to humour him."

She whispered piteously, "He mustn't be allowed to disgrace himself here, before all these persons. Do you think I'd better leave the theatre ?"

"No. That wouldn't be wise. Marley and others have noticed him already. Your leaving would confirm the scandal they scent. No. Face them bravely as you can. I think he'll keep his word : he'll be here presently. Can you face this ? Trust me ; I'll do my best to prevent new trouble for you. . . . They're ringing in the orchestra. The Governor must be here. Hester, dear Hester—" as with realization of her pallor and her trembling, "have courage. Nothing will happen amiss. Face this bravely."

She controlled her sick terror. She unfolded her fan to hide her face from the light. She did not heed the term of his address to her, or the hoarseness of his voice, or notice the intentness

of his gaze at her. She looked at the opposite box; her mother, superb in black silk with fine lace, appeared unaware of her presence, her gloved left hand rested motionless on the crimson velvet of the box front; her profile showed with the beauty and coldness of white marble; her gaze was directed to the Governor's box. Marley sat in the shadow beyond Julia; Julia was looking at Hester, and smiled at her, and waved her hand frankly. Hester nodded, smiling palely.

The ringing of a bell. The musicians rising, "God Save the Queen," shrilling from the fiddles. All rising; heads turning toward the Governor's box. Sir William Denison, grim of aspect, Lady Denison, smiling, charming; sheen and violet of silken gown; colour and blaze of decoration, of scarlet and gold. The Governor and his Lady and staff in the box; His Excellency bowing stiffly; Lady Denison bowing and smiling. The Anthem not drowning the cat-calls and the whistling, the sullen mutter of voices from the upper gallery, and the hoarse, dull mutter from the pit. Hester knew instantly, as society knew, the hostility of patrons in pit and gallery of the theatre, expressed in the jeers of triumph over the Governor, for the defeat of transportation, and the approach of the thanksgiving of the people for their victory.

Society countered instantly with cheers, and the waving of handkerchiefs and fans, and the clapping of hands. Louder jeers out-matched the cheers; stamping of feet, and hammering of sticks and umbrellas out-matched hand-clapping. The Anthem ceased. The Governor, his Lady and staff, were seated. All were seated. The din was hushed. The musicians dashed hurriedly, nervously to

"Masaniello": the performance of the lively overture at least sounded above the excited murmur of voices and the laughter.

Lady Denison was surveying the house. Hester, not stirring, but sitting white-faced and afraid in the light, saw Lady Denison bow gravely to Mrs. Carrick. In the eyes of society, Lady Denison turned her gaze towards Hester; leaned forward, smiled radiantly, and bowed to her.

Hester, making stiff and stately response, was conscious of the stares, the amazed pause of the watchers, the instant excited and wondering discussion then. She sat motionless, shading her face with her fan. Espying Lade with his daughters, looking up at her, Hester expected a glance of satisfaction and a whimsical smile, as he bowed to her, but she was disquieted to note his air of gravity, the real or imagined look of concern and sympathy; she assumed him aware of Holtham's altercation with Guard and withdrawal from the theatre.

Lamps and candles were extinguished. The theatre was dim, but for the white burning of the footlights. The crimson-and-gold curtain swayed slightly, and the lights fluttered and spluttered. Hester, trying to beat down rising terror for Holtham, pretended to concentrate her attention on the stage. The overture ended to a faint applause. A bell was ringing. She murmured to Guard, "Go now. Find him. Judge for yourself whether he's fit to come into the theatre, and if not, persuade him to drive home. I can slip away soon, without notice, I think."

The curtain was rising to the squeak of fiddles. The scene of Melnotte's Cottage was opening;

the nervous player of the Widow Melnotte was bustling absurdly about the table spread for supper, and the audience was applauding.

Hester knew that Guard was leaving the box quietly in the darkness. Scarcely seeing the stage; scarcely hearing a line; scarcely understanding the arrival of Melnotte and Pauline, superb of costume, nervous and awkward in the opening lines. Yet the young players—the handsome Melnotte and the fair Pauline—gaining confidence; the beauty of the scene developing to the polished richness of the lines of Melnotte's confession:

> "Pauline, by pride
> Angels have fallen ere thy time: by pride—
> That sole alloy of thy most lovely mould—
> The evil spirit of a bitter love,
> And a revengeful heart, had power upon thee."

Dear Heaven, would Guard never return; bring her word that her husband had agreed to leave the public-house and go home? Oh, Guard was coming now, both were coming. That stumbling throught the dark, that muttering of voices. The stir and the restlessness and the indignant cries for silence. She believed that Guard expostulated softly with Holtham, and that her husband answered thickly, with drunken laughter. She did not stir. She held her eyes bent resolutely on the stage.

> "Old gossips tell—how maidens sprung from kings
> Have stooped from their high sphere; how love, like death,
> Levels all ranks, and lays the shepherd's crook
> Beside the sceptre. Thus I made my home
> In the soft palace of a fairy future."

The floor of the box was creaking. A chair fell with a crash. The audience was growing angry. She heard the indignant cries and murmurs for silence. She saw the faces turned toward the box. She stretched out her hand, caught Holtham's wrist, and guided him forward to the chair beside her. She whispered, "Oh, hush, pray," as he muttered her name, and laughed. Guided by her and supported by Guard, he reached the chair beside her. She smelt the reek of spirits, and by the white play of the footlights she saw his face livid, and his eyes glittering, and his lips snarling. She uttered swift and whispered appeal to Guard: "Is there no hope to get him away?"

"No. But I think he'll be quiet now."

"Why did you let him come into the theatre?"

"I couldn't prevent him. I did my best."

Melnotte's words sounded from the stage:

> "Despair is free!
> I will not tell thee of the throes—the struggles—
> The anguish—the remorse: No, let it pass!
> And let me come to such most poor atonement
> Yet in my power!"

Holtham sat stupidly, dully, in his chair. If only he would stay quiet now. If only the measure of his degradation might not be divulged to all this audience, this society of Hobarton, from whose circle, else, now he might not be excluded; from this gracious Lady whose aim in smile and bow before the eyes of society had been to aid Hester to redeem and restore——

This drunken creature of the System, huddled in the chair beside her.

CHAPTER XXIV

DEMONSTRATION

TO the end of the scene from *The Lady of Lyons*, Holtham sat in silence. Hester believed him stupefied by drink; watching in a torment of anxiety his livid face, his huddled figure, shadowy and indefinite, she knew him indistinct to the spectators in the subdued light. She prayed that the rekindling, relighting of lamps and candles between scene and scene might not reveal him, if sunk into drunken sleep. She knew Guard to be intent and watchful.

The scene ended to a storm of clapping and cheering. The players appeared before the curtain for curtsy and bow; the musicians, with confidence now, began the overture to *The Daughter of The Regiment*. The flutter of the few candles, lit to guide the way to the stairs, and the tavern, did not reveal Holtham's features more clearly, yet Hester was cruelly conscious of the upturned faces and the staring eyes. He did not move still; she wondered what must be the effect of, and the conjecture concerning, the deathly white face, the black frowning brows, and the eyes gleaming, intent and merciless, in their survey of Mrs. Carrick in her box.

Mrs. Carrick appeared unaware of his presence or Hester's. She did not glance toward their box; her fan swayed; she chatted with Julia and Marley. Hester, watching, believed in Julia's

repeated glances, show of sympathy and fear.

Hester pretended to study her programme. The black letters on the grey sheet spun and flickered before her eyes. She made out with the difficulty, ere the overture ended, that officers and men of the Garrison would play the Capitol Scene from *Rienzi*; Lieut. Ord, the Melnotte of the earlier scene, would appear as Cola di Rienzi, and she understood the significance of Guard's tactless comment at dinner, that Mr. Ord would surely receive the deuce of a wigging for such a choice; Rienzi's speech of freedom, nigh the eve of the public celebration of the abolition of transportation! Sir William could not know the play.

Yet, with anxiety growing less through Holtham's quiet, and Guard's cheerful whispers of confidence, she watched with composure, even with faint interest, the opening of the scene before the gates of the Capitol, the citizens in brown and blue with black caps, the sudden, forceful appearance of Rienzi, wrapped in his black mantle, and bare-headed, to the sounds of cheering. She had not heeded till now the restlessness of pit and upper gallery through the interval: the jeers and the cheers, and their clear direction at Sir William Denison. Now, at the cheering from the stage, cheering sounded with loud stamping and rapping from pit and gallery; this uproar ceasing, the young actor, with genuine fire and strength took up the famous incitement:

> "Friends,
> "I come not here to talk. Ye know too well
> The story of our thraldom. We are slaves!"

Instantly from gallery and pit storm burst—

cheers and jeers still; from the gallery hostile eyes were peering; hands were gesticulating and pointing at the Governor, sitting grim and scowling, chin high and eyes ablaze, with Lady Denison, shrinking a little, and leaning towards him. The storm lulled; the player's voice, pitched to be heard above tumult, struck through the theatre:

> "Base, ignoble slaves—slaves to a horde—
> Of petty tyrants, feudal despots, lords."

Again the roar of sound engulfed his words; from society shrill and indignant protest now, but from pit and upper gallery cheers and jeers, still; Sir William Denison sat immovable, and Lady Denison covered her face with her fan.

> "Each hour dark fraud,
> Or open rapine, or protected murder,
> Cry out against them."

Wild excitement surged through uproar, laughter, cheering; the note of triumph seemed dominant over darker passion; the Governor, for the little while, was ignored; excitement swayed towards the stage, and was held there; the young actor played with increasing force, as though accepting cheers in tribute, and encouraged by the clamour. The clamour dying, as Rienzi told his tale of bitter wrong, and murder of the beloved brother. But surging up again:

> "Rouse, ye Romans! Rouse, ye slaves."

And the cheering rolled through the theatre in waves of sound. Hester, shrinking, trembling, from this fierce sound of emotion, and understanding the significance of demonstration, saw Holtham rise from his chair, and stand, swaying, at the front

of the box. Instantly Guard was by him, as she, and urging him to sit down, fearing his fall from the box; he flung off Guard's hands; he muttered hoarsely, bending toward Hester, "What are you fearing? Fearing? What are you fearing?—I say. Ashamed of me, is that it? Ashamed of me?"

She murmured pitifully, "Oh, hush, hush! Come away with me. Let us go now."

He muttered still, "I stay here. Sit you down . . . sit you down!"

Surging sound held their voices from the audience yet Holtham's vast figure, in the front of the box, was clear to all eyes of society.

"John. For pity's sake, come away."

"Go, if you want to go. Go with Guard. Your lover, Guard."

She shuddered, and drew back. She said, "I'll not forgive this." And to Guard's appeal, "Mrs. Holtham, you mustn't stay here. He's mad with drink. Come away!—" she nodded, accepted his arm, and drew slowly back, yet paused for the while in the shadow of the box, not heeding Guard's entreaty, "Hester, Hester, come away! I'll come back for him—" but yet intent on the black-clad figure looming against the white light and the blur of colour.

Up from the stage the bell was sounding through shouting, "Hail to our tribune!" and the music of a march. Rienzi's voice rose strident:

"Hark—the bell, the bell!
The knell of tyranny—the mighty voice,
That, to the city and the plain—to earth,
And listening Heaven, proclaims the glorious tale
Of Rome re-born, and Freedom!"

She shrank back from the roar of voices and the clangour of the bell. She saw Holtham's right hand, now clenched, now shaken fiercely toward the Governor; she heard his wild laughter, and his cry, "The bell! The bell! Freedom!"

Guard hurried her half-swooning from the theatre—the horror of sight and sound.

CHAPTER XXV

SPIRIT FAINTING

GUARD insisted that Hester should drive home in the carriage. Holtham and he would take a cab. He would induce him to leave the theatre and go home; let Hester rely on that.

She was driven away from the sounds of tumult: the roar of voices, wild laughter and screams in the theatre and from the crowd assembled about the doors, and from the excited men and women scurrying out of the taverns and the lane. She sank back on the cushions, breathless, sick and shuddering with fear and disgust. Sense of personal calamity for the while overruled her judgment of her husband; with full understanding of Lady Denison's kindly purpose, and of the social value and significance to her and Holtham from this gesture—the smile and bow of the Governor's wife, she knew Holtham's appearance in the theatre, drunk, and his wild cry from the box and laughter, and his menace to Sir William Denison, as the representative of the System, in his eyes, to be cruelly and ironically disastrous. It meant affront to, and alienation of, the kindly lady, new affront to society, new and public demonstration of himself as worthless and degraded.

Worthless! Not deserving the tolerance or the charity of society. Not deserving loyalty, or

duty, sacrifice, from his wife; against the satisfaction of his vicious craving for drink not accounting her, though she had given up for him, and Rosa Anne, social position, security, and the seclusion to which her nature, her diffidence, her life in her mother's house, inclined her. Not meriting help or sympathy. She was incapable of any love for him: such love as she had felt for him those years ago. She was incapable of pity now.

How could she love this man debased and distorted by the System; the chain-gang and the Penitentiary? How could she, in her maturity, with the standards and refinements of Carrick House upon her, think without shuddering aversion, of Holtham, of any man, with the brand, the taint, of the prison on him? The folly and the passion of the girl for the handsome lad, even though an assigned servant, had died long since; love, esteem, honour, could not arise from the dust and ashes of the past.

Yet she had striven—how she had striven!—to recall and restore the man from the creature of the System. Yet for her duty, for her love of Rosa Anne, and for memories, memories, she had faced life with him, thought to share the years with him, with courage, with endurance of social slights, and with faith. Yet she had prayed—how passionately, devoutly, and humbly had prayed!—that Heaven would strengthen her and Holtham, to his redemption. She had the pitiful, ironic thought now, through a whirl of thoughts, terrors, sentiments, sense of disgust and shame, that redemption to her had meant social restoration, that he, despite the brand of prison, might, by

honesty, and uprightness, and seemly living, be tolerated, and forgiven, if not accepted, by society.

Thought of the scene in the theatre, the revelation of the drunken Holtham, brought waves of colour to her cheeks. She was stricken with sick fear of the consequences to herself and Holtham; ostracism must be definite and complete; loneliness more desolating to her, and to him, than through these cruel months. She surveyed desperately Julia's humiliation before society, and her defeat by Marley and his folk in her attempted intervention on her sister's behalf. Hester set from mind and heart the thought of her mother and Carrick House.

She imagined, and she shuddered at, the effect on her husband's morbid mind from understanding of the disgrace, which he had inflicted on himself and her. She was confident of his devotion to her in his sober senses, as of his devotion to little Rosa Anne. She was incapable yet of any thought of forgiveness, or of new succour to him; yet she grew capable, as she neared home, of fairer judgment of him, of his struggle with destiny, his attempt to break the shackles of the past—with the opening of the prison gates, to be free in truth—yet his defeat: Port Arthur had his soul still in thrall. The torment of the past and the shadow of the pitiless years were black upon his soul; the sense of degradation in the eyes of other men, and his own eyes, defeated spirit, purpose, hope. He was the prisoner of Port Arthur, now that he was liberated and enriched, as ever in the days of Penitentiary. The lowering of the cloud, the sense of servitude to the past, the horror and

the shame of his marred self, induced and compelled the solace—anodyne—of intoxicants.

She passed to wondering dully how far she had been wanting in her duty: how far she had failed him: how she might have encountered and defeated the influence of the pest upon him. She was incapable now, as always, of interpreting his drunkenness as the factor destroying his life, bringing to ruin the structure of the new life for him which he and she had planned, how little a while ago! She shaped in fantasy the influence of Port Arthur on him as of an evil spirit possessing—rending his soul: even as the strong man Saul of Israel, possessed of an evil spirit, sent of the Lord, he was possessed: this prompted him in, compelled him to, all his drunkenness, his black and bitter moods; if she had loved him, she must have matched her love, her strength, against this pitiless, soul-destroying force of the System, but if she had loved him, could she have prevailed?

Did her own fault lie in this lack of love? Did he, loving her, acutely sensitive of scorn and sneers, and shrinking from him, understand how she shrank from him? Though, till this night, she had not hated him.

The fog lay on the lower quarter of the city only; on the New town Road the air was clear and mild. Descending from the carriage, and climbing the steps wearily, Hester was conscious of the sweetness of jonquils from the garden, and of the high glitter of stars.

She saw the yellow shining of light from Rosa Anne's window; and her fear was instant, as her question of Martha, opening the door to her knock: "Is Rosie not so well—not sleeping

quietly? Or why is light burning in her room?"

"She's been restless and strange, m'm," Martha answered. "She woke soon after you was gone, and she wanted you. I think she was wandering in her wits, ma'am, by the queer things she said. But I gave her some medicine, and kep' her warm, and she's sleeping now. Is the master not home with you, m'm?"

"He's coming later, with Mr. Guard," Hester said, walking to the stairs. "You may go to bed now, Martha. You look tired out."

"Thank you, m'm; I am that same. But I'll set up, if you think she wants watching through the night."

"I can attend to her, thank you, Martha. You have done enough. Good night."

Hester climbed the stairs, and entered the sick room, and drew back the curtain of the bed. At the stir of the curtain, and the soft light from the candles, the child started up, crying out, but, recognizing Hester, stretched out her arms, smiling. Hester bent to kiss her, adjusted the pillow and the coverlet about her, and Rosa Anne passing again to troubled sleep, Hester let the curtain fall gently and sat down in the chair by the fire.

In melancholy reflection, in anxiety for her little daughter's restlessness, and for the murmuring voice, she sat so, till the clock struck twelve. She heard the rattle of wheels from the road, and she hurried downstairs, and opened the front door.

The lamp burned in the porch, and by its light she saw Guard approach—alone.

CHAPTER XXVI

GESTURE BY MRS. CARRICK

WITH the approach of the public celebration, for the end of transportation, and the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Colony, the bells of Holy Trinity rang triumphantly that Sabbath morning. Joy and triumph seemed to Hester, driving to church, to mock her sorrow and her fear.

Guard, with gravity and deep concern for her, had reported his failure to induce Holtham to return; he had met him reeling from the theatre, amid uproar and confusion; and had aided him through the mob assembled by the sounds of riot and disorder. Guard had gathered later that Holtham, in a storm of cheering and hooting directed from upper gallery and pit against the Governor, had stood livid of look, muttering, and shaking of fist at Sir William, as though directing outbreak of public feeling against the representative of the Queen. The curtain had been rung down; Lade had hurried to the box, and had induced Holtham to leave the theatre.

Guard admitted the scandal, but stressed the fact that Holtham, known as a victim of the System, would find many supporters among the opponents of transportation, just as he had won them in the theatre.

Guard had found him intractable: incapable, he believed, of understanding his appeal to him

to accompany him home at once; his mind had appeared wandering, yet, Guard had emphasized to Hester, he showed in aspect and in gait, no definite sign of intoxication; rather he suggested a mind drugged or unhinged: at Hester's look of horror, Guard had not proceeded with his theory.

Holtham had broken away from him suddenly near the theatre, and had appeared to rush down toward the waterside, but in the thickness of the fog Guard had found it impossible to trace him: search of the waterside taverns at that hour was unthinkable. Guard had returned to the theatre, and had conferred with Lade; fearing greater scandal and suffering for Hester, he had judged well not to report to the police office his fears, and ask for a search; Lade had agreed readily with this, arguing that Holtham would find his way home in safety.

Lade would call at the house on Sunday afternoon, Guard had added, looking at her strangely.

Through Hester's fear and shame, Guard's sympathy, and assurance of loyal friendship from him and Lade, alone had offered solace; Guard had waited with her for hours for Holtham's return. Holtham had come home toward three o'clock: sodden, and reeking with drink, a wild spectacle of debauchery and disaster. Guard and she had aided the tottering, sagging, silent figure into the study, and when he fell on the couch, had loosened collar and cravat, and raised his head upon a pillow, and covered him with a rug, and left him sunk in stupor. Hester had refused Guard's offer to stay the night, in watch of him: no, the coachman was a strong fellow; she would rouse him, if need were.

Thanking Guard pitifully, and dismissing him.

Holtham had been quiet through the night, but had been early astir; she had seen him from her window pacing dully to and fro in the garden, with his head bent, and his aspect ghastly. He had appeared at the breakfast table, but had not spoken: she had given him neither look nor word, having a sense of sick repulsion from him, and of horror of him. Even with the doctor's early morning visit to Rosa Anne, and his report that, while the child was feverish, he found no cause for immediate anxiety, she had not brought herself to speak to her husband, for the sake of appearances: social pretence was over. Holtham had listened moodily to the doctor's opinion; she had accompanied the bluff, kindly gentleman to the gate.

To her insistent questions he had admitted the child's weakness as a definite danger. Yes, he traced it to neglect and lack of nutrition in the past; certainly demanding all care and attention.

There was no reason still for grave anxiety from her present weakness, but she was weak, very weak. He was aware, Hester had believed, of the affair at the theatre; he had made no mention of this, but his sharp gaze at her, and the firm pressure of his hand on hers, on taking leave, had convinced her of his knowledge and his sympathy.

She had hurried back to the sick room; the child had seemed dozing peacefully, with Martha in grim, efficient attendance.

Hester was hesitant of attendance at church, but at the summons of the bells she felt a longing for the peace and solace of Holy Trinity. She dressed hurriedly, putting on a violet mantle over her

black gown, and darkly veiling her face. The carriage awaited her by the steps. Holtham was standing in the porch, staring out moodily. She nerved herself to ask quietly, "Are you coming to church": and at his shake of head, she passed by him, stepped into the carriage, and was driven off.

The grey gloom of the morning accorded with her distressful mood, her sense of humiliation, and her fear for the little girl. The sun contended with piling clouds; a keen wind was blowing from the north-west. She had an indefinite sense of the mountain's whiteness and blue-blackness through a break in clouds. Always, through the crying wind, the bells were clamorous, but without sweetness or appeal or beauty to her. She imagined a pitiless arrogance in the clashing, clanging tone, when she stepped down from the carriage, and walked quietly to the church door, ignoring all assembling for the service. The church itself, through the blackness of her veil, seemed shadowy and indefinite. She raised her eyes toward the carved stone cross, and thought it nebulous and unreal.

Yet when she took her seat in her pew alone, and bent her head in prayer for the child, for Holtham, and herself, the influence of the peace and beauty of the church, the rich glow of glass as though the sunlight triumphed over threat of storm, the gleaming of the gilded cross, the white austerity of the altar—all the atmosphere of her religious life—seemed of a Divine beneficence toward her. Praying for the child, she had a memory that gracious words concerning little children had sounded down through Christendom: and the love and beauty of the words, as though

mystically breathed to her, in answer to her prayer, inspired her soul from its despond; fervently she prayed for Rosa Anne; might she be given health and strength and happiness like other children; let not the sins of pride and selfishness be visited upon the innocent.

And for the hope, the comfort, the confidence, she believed her prayer instantly answered; then she prayed, without fervour, yet in earnest intercession, for her husband; but by the very image of him so conjured, and by her sense of shrinking from him even in thought, her prayers were formless. Struggling to fashion prayer for him, she was incapable of contemplated petition for forgiveness for herself, her weakness, and her inability to love this man, as the prisons had made him, but only the memory of him long ago.

She did not heed the filling of the church about her. She did not heed the opening of the service, and she disregarded the conjectures, the wonder, that for the first time since her reunion with Holtham, he had not accompanied her to Trinity, or the inevitable thoughts and whispers of the significance of her attendance alone. She did not glance toward the pews of Carrick House.

But in her struggle for clear prayer, for light, and guidance for her husband and for herself; in the whirl and conflict of her thoughts, even with the serenity of beauty of sight and sound about her, she bore no true share in the stately service. She did not thrill to the triumphant Psalm. She did not heed the significance of text and sermon, the timely theme, the triumph of humanitarian, the defeat of transportation to be celebrated on Wednesday; the assertion of loyalty and devotion

to the Queen: the spirit of the Lord had ruled the counsels of men. The bells of Holy Trinity would sound the triumph and the glory of the Lord, fitting the inscription of the tenor bell: "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the earth."

But the bells!—the thought of the pealing of the bells through Wednesday alone was clear to Hester from the preacher's words and fervour. The bells of Holy Trinity, exercising on her life so mystical, so beautiful, and divine an influence, yet to her husband, who in chains, had toiled to fashion the golden stone for this House of the Lord, conjuring only the memory of tormented horror. She had the ironic thought that the bells of this very church would sound the downfall of the System which had destroyed him; he had aided to build the house; the bells would sound to the glory and the justice of God, the House and the Spirit of the House triumphant.

But a builder broken . . .

She shuddered for the thought; the impiety of the thought. She bent her head anew in prayer, and now, in very truth, she prayed with fervour and passion: dear Heaven, in the victory of the House and in the triumph of the bells, let not her husband perish!

Yet without clear hope, or confidence of answer to her prayer for him, but only for her child, she passed out of the church to the high sounding of the organ. She had not heeded the girls of Carrick House, her mother, and Julia, but as by habit of old, she turned involuntarily to right of the doorway, as though to marshal her charges: and in the wet greyness of the noon, she saw her mother

stand. No one was with her, through the threatening weather, Hester guessed. Black-robed, and majestic, her veil raised, her mother faced her; her gaze met Hester's gaze. But not now in contemptuous pride, not with rejection, only with a show of pity, sympathy, and affection, as of the spirit's triumph over the falsities of pride.

"Hester! My dear! My poor child."

Arms outstretched; head bending; lips offering to Hester's kiss. No apparent heed of stares and amazement, of figures halting in the doorway for wonder, and propelled forward by outcoming worshippers. Voice quavering, and tearful:

"Hester, my heart bled for you last night. I came alone to church this morning, only to see you; only to speak—tell you."

Hester said dully, "Yes, Mother, yes."

"Will you not walk home with me now, Hester?"

"No, thank you. The little girl is sick."

"Julia told me: yes, but she thought she was getting better. Hester, she's not seriously ill, is she? Don't say that."

And with a sudden gasp of horror at her daughter's stricken look: "Not through the past? Not through me? You don't suggest——"

"Only through me, Mother," Hester said. "Only through folly, Fate. But . . . but in the church this morning, I took comfort. Comfort, believing, knowing my prayers were answered.

CHAPTER XXVII

FOLLY OF SACRIFICE

HESTER, having directed the coachman to drive slowly ahead, walked to High Street with Mrs. Carrick. She acquitted her mother of hypocrisy: beyond doubt, Lady Denison's intervention on Hester's behalf had directed Mrs. Carrick in thought and action; the very demonstration in the theatre and the fresh notoriety of Holtham had determined the gesture of forgiveness. Forgiving, Mrs. Carrick would forgive magnificently.

Less through her weariness and dejection than through the sense of consolation from prayer and intercession, Hester listened kindly and tolerantly to her Mother's proffers of restored affection. Mamma at least believed herself in earnest, even in her expressed concern for Rosa Anne. Still, Hester was moved by Mrs. Carrick's words, ere they parted: she had not spoken of Holtham, but she said now, looking steadily, searchingly, and strangely at her daughter, "If you find your life intolerable, Hester, and beyond even your sense of duty, please bear in mind that my home is open as a refuge to you and your little girl."

Hester did not answer; she kissed Mrs. Carrick; she stepped into the carriage, knowing intuitively that an invitation to drive her Mother, in Holtham's carriage, to Carrick House, would be declined.

Driving home, she reviewed the offer of refuge,

if, in truth, Rosa Anne and she must leave Holtham. She believed herself capable of endurance still, even under the shadow of new disgrace, but for the strain of fear, the frequency of wild moods and drunken bouts, the hopelessness, now in truth she believed not loving him, of reforming him, and re-establishing him in honourable life.

Her first thought, on entering the house, was not of her husband but of the child. She hurried to the sick room; the little girl was lying in a deep sleep. Martha rose from her chair by the window.

Yes, Miss Rosie had slept all the morning. Yes, the master had looked in to see her. "She was lying that quiet, ma'am, you might have said she was dead, and I fear he thought so, ma'am, being strange like."

Hester looked at her sharply, and knew the truth from the woman's look: he had been drinking.

"Where is Mr. Holtham now?" she asked stiffly.

"Oh, he's gone out, ma'am, this long time. He went away soon as he'd been in to see Miss Rosie."

"Thank you, Martha. You may go downstairs now."

"Will you want dinner kept back, ma'am, if so be as the master's late?"

"No. Tell them to serve it at one o'clock."

Holtham did not return; Hester dined alone. His absence must have been a relief to her but for anxiety. Anxiety had increased to actual terror by the time of Lade's arrival, in the late afternoon: to his instant questions, "What's the matter, my dear? Holtham, of course. Where is he?" she whispered, nigh to tears, "I don't know. He came back last night."

"Yes, Guard rode over to see me early this morning. Guard, by the way, will be here this afternoon."

She nodded: "He's been very kind. Come into the parlour; there's a fire there, and the afternoon is cold."

He followed her; he sat down by the hearth, facing her; he asked then, "Well, what about Holtham? He's out again, you say. Drinking again, of course?"

"I fear so, yes," she said. "I went to church alone this morning. I couldn't endure the house, and . . . and I wanted to pray, to intercede for Rosa Anne. Don't smile, don't sneer!"

"My dear, I'm doing neither," he assured her gently, as to check her hysterical outburst. "I know you are a good woman. I honour you for your faith as I do for your sense of duty. Please, believe this. You saw your mother at church?"

"Why, yes."

"Are you reconciled with her?"

"Yes, in a sense, yes. She's told you, has she?"

"Well, I assumed this from my conversation with her after the theatre last night."

"The theatre!" she murmured. "That shameful scene!"

He interrupted hastily, "But, Mrs. Holtham, what need have you, yourself, to talk in such a tone?"

"How—such a tone?"

"Of terror and despair."

"Knowing the ruin . . . ruin."

He said earnestly, "Pray believe me, Mrs. Holtham, that you are, to Hobarton as I know it, the object only of sincere sympathy for your

sufferings, and of admiration for your courage and devotion."

She whispered sadly, "I don't understand, altogether, Mr. Lade."

"Well, I think, from last night, folk, who perhaps were censorious of you before, recognize the extent and nature of your sacrifice, Mrs. Holtham."

"Sacrifice! Sacrifice?"

"To your sense of duty, my dear."

She shook her head. "No. In expiation."

"Mrs. Holtham, that's mere fancy. What had you to expiate?"

She cried out, "For having shared in making him what he is."

"But, my dear young lady, you torture your mind cruelly and unnecessarily," he said. "You had no share in Holtham's punishment."

"I was the cause."

"Unwittingly."

"Maybe, but still the cause."

He persisted, "And I say you had no duty of expiation, or of sacrifice, Mrs. Holtham."

"I had a duty to my child, sir."

"In a sense, yes," he conceded. "A duty indeed, but not of such a sacrifice as return to Holtham."

She looked at him in wonder; she said sadly, "I joined him here of my free will, Mr. Lade."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Holtham. No. You came to this house so that you might be near the child. You were not given credit for this in Hobarton. You were blamed, perhaps derided, for infatuation for him still."

Desperately she said, "I did not even love him.

I could not love him. I could only shrink from him."

"Being as he is——"

"No. As the creature of the prison. Because the brand is on him. Because the very thought of his shame, though it was, it is, torment to him, torment, repels me from him. Being no longer a love-sick girl. Being older, and having learnt to care for safety, seemliness, and refinement. Shrinking from him; always shrinking from him."

"I say again, dear Mrs. Holtham, your loyalty to him has done you honour."

She shook her head; she murmured sadly, "But I have failed him, failed him utterly. Not being able to love the creature of the System. Love, only love, could have hoped to defeat the past, destroy the past. Only such love as I could not give him, can't give him, ever. And he knows this."

"And now, Mrs. Holtham?"

She was stricken by the strangeness of his tone, and the intentness of his look at her; she repeated faintly, "Now? Now? What do you mean?"

"Do you think to leave him; you and the little girl?"

"For my Mother's house," she whispered, "do you mean?"

"Of course I do! Mrs. Carrick herself has given me clearly to understand that her house is open to you both."

Hester could not repress the sneer: "With Lady Denison's approval, and the assurance of no injury to Carrick House?"

"Possibly," he conceded dryly. "But, at least, you'd be safe and secluded at the house. I could induce Holtham to agree to separation, and due

maintenance for yourself and the child. He's still very wealthy."

She said, without hesitation, "No, Mr. Lade. I shall not leave my husband until he bids me. I wonder at your suggestion, or your discussion with my Mother. I wonder indeed."

"I repeat," he said with satire, "that your devotion does you infinite credit, Mrs. Holtham."

"My expiation; always my expiation."

He said, gravely and earnestly, leaning forward, "But, Mrs. Holtham, if in my opinion, if watching the progress, the descent of Holtham from depth to depth, I urge the inadvisability, the insecurity of life . . . continuance . . . here with him, in such a state of mind . . . ?"

She repeated, shuddering, "My expiation still, Mr. Lade."

He shrugged his shoulders. He stood up. He said harshly, "Mrs. Holtham, my advice as your friend will be supported by the advice of your friends and folk this very afternoon. I think I hear the gate. They should be coming now."

Hester started up in astonishment and terror, and hurried to the window. She saw, with agitation, her Mother and Julia entering the garden; Marley and Guard were following.

She turned instantly to Lade, standing by the hearth; she faltered, "What does this mean? Is this a plot? Why are all here?"

"I have told you the reason, Mrs. Holtham," he said, coolly.

"Last night, you think because of last night; only because of last night——?"

He answered gravely, "No. But because of my own knowledge, my very recent knowledge, of

your husband's life, the nature of his associates."

"I'll not listen. I'll not endure."

He leaned forward, his gaze intent on her: "But you will listen, Mrs. Holtham. I followed your wish. I made instant inquiry of your husband's haunts and habits through these mysterious absences of his from home. The information was given to me by the police officers. This man, for whom you sacrifice yourself, your child, is the associate, the boon companion, of the vilest scum of the prison. His old mates, friends, partners in misery and degradation in the chain-gang, and the Penitentiary. Mrs. Holtham, even had you loved him, your love could not have triumphed over the past. I tested the truth of this. I told this to your Mother after the theatre last night. I told Guard. That is why they are here, your folk and friends: I claim to be among the oldest of your friends. They're here to take you away—if you wish, Mrs. Holtham."

CHAPTER XXVIII

REFUGE REJECTED

SHE nerved herself, though trembling from calamitous knowledge, abhorrence of her husband, and terror, to receive them with an air of composure. She kissed her Mother, and led her to a chair by the fire. She kissed Julia, offered her hand to Henry Marley, and to Will Guard, and begged them to be seated. She sat down, facing her Mother, with Julia seated beside her; Marley and Guard drew back to the window seat, and Lade stood before the fire.

Mrs. Carrick would have spoken; Hester checked her instantly, saying in a hard and clear voice, "You need not tell me why you are all here, Mamma, thank you. Mr. Lade has just told me, all he has learnt, concerning my husband."

"By no means all," Lade objected.

"All that I wish to hear from him," she said steadily. "And he has told me that you think that we, little Rosa Anne and I, should not stay longer in this house. So you have come to take us away?"

"At once, Hester!" Mrs. Carrick declared in a tone of command. "You need not sneer so. We think only of you, not of ourselves. I hinted to you this morning that my home was open to you and your child, and at once. We have driven over from Carrick House—the carriage is at the gate. Is there any need to wait?"

Hester said scornfully, "Mamma, I thank you all for coming like this, and I thank you for offering to take me back to Carrick House—not caring for the harm I may do the school, or Rosa Anne may do the school."

"Hester, please!" Mrs. Carrick protested in indignant tone.

"Dear Mamma, you're all very good, but I am entitled, surely, to judge for myself. And I'm not leaving my husband's house."

"Hester," Julia urged, "you must! You must, Hester. Mustn't she, Harry? Mustn't she?"

"If Mrs. Holtham will allow me to advise," Marley began; Hester interrupted angrily, "No, and no, and no."

"Hester, I fear you do not understand," Mrs. Carrick said, shaking her head.

"Oh, do I not?" Hester whispered. "Do I not?"

"The depth, Hester, to which——"

"The depth," she said in a bitter, wailing tone, ghastly of look now, and staring before her with unseeing eyes, "the depth to which my husband has descended. Do I not understand? Ah, do I not?"

"Hester, no gentlewoman can——"

"Mother. Mother, you do not understand, but I . . . but I, being his wife, know him, and his sufferings of mind and spirit; always the shame, the shadow, the horror of the past upon his soul, the arrow in his very heart, and the fetters on his life. Do I not know the depths of terror from which he's tried to rise, and how he's struggled for the last shreds of manhood in him, spirit, courage—only to rise? Do I not know the depth to which

life, destiny, cast him; and from which no man, like him, might hope, might pray, to lift himself?"

"Hester, if for any act of mine you blame me now," her Mother said, her voice steady and her eyes calm and clear; "if you accredit me with—if you accuse me of this wretched man's destruction——"

"Mother. Mother, why speak now of the past, so late, too late?"

"Yet I shall speak!" she said inflexibly. "Yet I shall speak and justify myself before all here. I shall justify myself. I say that any part I bore against this man, for the punishment of this man, and for his separation from your life, and always I prayed for separation: if I approved of all my husband did—and wholly I approved, I was guided only by my love of you."

"And by your pride, Mother," Hester said lifelessly. "By your pride!"

"And by my pride in you," she answered, with look unruffled, and in unfaltering tone. "And by my pride in our good name, and for my duty to you, and our name, our class, our caste, ourselves. My action was inevitable, as my rule of life is rigid, Hester. I have no sense of guilt, and I shall brook no blame, for this man's punishment, and for his ruin and his degradation."

Hester cried out, "I'll not bear this, Mother! I'll not listen."

"Not mine the fault, and not my husband's, Hester," Mrs. Carrick persisted, ignoring protest. "The fault was Holtham's own: his shame, his vices now, were not born—did not result from the prison of his punishment, but from the evil in

him, from which in vain, in vain, I did my utmost to protect you."

Hester did not speak, and did not stir, sitting with her hands clasped at her bosom; her face was deathly pale, and her eyes staring, yet seeing nothing.

Julia's arm stole gently about her sister's shoulders; she murmured, "Hester, I beg you, we all beg you, to come away. If he be in the house still, Harry and Will here will protect you from him. Come, dear. Where's little Rosa Anne? In bed still? Let me go upstairs with you, and help you to wrap her in a rug, and carry her down."

"I urge this, Mrs. Holtham," Lade said, bending toward her.

"Come, Hester, be sensible!" Mrs. Carrick said; Marley had risen, as though weary of the scene; Guard had not spoken; Hester grew faintly conscious of his look of sympathy.

She turned toward him with a pitiful look, and with the piteous words, "And you, Will, do you urge this? Do you approve?"

He nodded, but did not speak: she whispered, "Leave my husband, without a word, without another effort to help him! Do you urge this? Do you?"

He hesitated; he looked at her; he muttered thickly, "I wish this, Hester . . . Mrs. Holtham . . . I wish you in security, you and the little girl—but—but——"

Mrs. Carrick turned, and eyed him angrily; Lade protested, "But, Guard, my dear Guard!"

"Hester," he said slowly, "you alone can decide this for yourself."

She bowed her head; she said firmly, "And I stay here, of course, with my husband."

Marley turned from the window: "He's coming up to the house now. No. Mrs. Holtham, I beg you—" as Hester rose and tottered toward the window, "I beg you not to look at him!"

CHAPTER XXIX

"BUT FOR THIS!"

HOLTHAM came reeling across the hall, and halted in the open doorway of the parlour. He was hatless, his dress disordered, his cravat torn from its ring; dust and the abrasion on his face showed that he had fallen; the knuckles of his right hand were bleeding. He supported himself against the doorpost; his look livid; his eyes bloodshot and staring.

For the while, none stirred, none spoke. Guard, Marley, and Lade had interposed between Holtham and the women; Hester stood by the window, white and spectral in the dim light of the clouded afternoon; her eyes wide, and her lips parted, as in an ironic smile.

She whispered then, "Don't stir, don't speak, any of you! He does not know you. He cannot see you. I shall speak to him, and persuade him to go quietly to the study, and lie down."

Guard would have drawn her back, as she moved noiselessly forward. She checked him with a fierce gesture; she approached Holtham, and compelled herself to touch his hand, and to say gently, "Dear, you're tired; you're ill. Come with me, please. . . . Yes, give me your arm, and let me lead you. . . . Yes."

At the touch of her hand and at her words he started instantly to mad rage and action; he cried out a vile oath, and struck her in the face. As she

recoiled, she avoided the full force of the blow, yet almost she fell: Guard and Marley leaped forward instantly, but as they reached Holtham, he reeled, seemed to collapse, and fell, face downward, at their feet. Julia's arms were about Hester; Mrs. Carrick was gasping, "Hester! Hester! Will you stay with him now? Oh, Hester, come away at once! Come home!"

Hester's hand touched her bruised cheek. She stood looking down at Holtham, senseless and breathing stertorously: Guard had stooped, and was loosening his collar. She said in a clear, hard tone, "Do not touch him, Will. Let him lie there, till his servants find him, and carry him to his bed, as many a night, as many a time."

"Hester, he might have killed you with such a blow!" Julia was crying. "Oh, you mustn't stay another moment! You mustn't! You can't!"

"Hester," Mrs. Carrick implored, "you're coming home with us at once, aren't you? Mr. Guard, Mr. Lade, Henry, pray help me. Persuade her. Insist that she stay no longer in this house. Risking her life, and the child's!"

Hester stilled the murmur of voices, exhorting, remonstrating, pleading, with an impatient gesture. She looked down still at Holtham. She strove to conjure up the memory of the lover and young husband of long ago, the lad of long ago, in this drunken and degraded figure: the swollen, sunburnt neck, the purple flush spreading through the livid cheeks; she heard the stertorous breathing. She shuddered and drew back.

She said, and her voice was harsh and jangling, "I would have stayed, but for this . . . this blow. I would have given all my life to him, for duty,

but for this blow. Let the prison keep its own! Let the System have its creation! But . . . but, Mr. Lade, all of you—" with a sudden peal of hysterical laughter, "the bells . . . the bells he fears so much. The bells!"

"Hester," Mrs. Carrick cried. "Hester, please, please!"

"Hester, do come away, before he wakes!" Julia urged. "Let's dress and wrap up poor little Rosa Anne, and carry her downstairs."

Hester's laughter sounded still: "The bells of Trinity: the Church he helped to build. They'll be ringing soon, because transportation's ended: they'll be ringing . . . ringing!"

Her laughter broke in wild sobbing. She covered her eyes with her hands. Julia and Mrs. Carrick led her swiftly past the fallen man, and from the room.

CHAPTER XXX

THE PRAYER

HESTER, on entering her old room at Carrick House, saw that furniture and appointments had been changed in no way. All was in order as for her reception. Her mother and Julia had been confident of her leaving her husband that afternoon and returning to Carrick House.

The little room across the corridor had been made ready for Rosa Anne. A fire was burning; the bed was spread with a gay patchwork quilt, and the curtains were tied with cherry-coloured ribbons.

No. Mother and Julia had not doubted her decision. Hester might have resented this confidence in her meek acquiescence with Mrs. Carrick's wish and plans. In normal mood, she would have been moved to scorn and anger: her Mother, after all the cruel hurt done to Hester and her husband, and even to little Rosa Anne, was thus assured of herself: she had only to express her forgiveness, tolerance, and readiness to receive her errant daughter, overlooking all the injury which Hester might have done, but had not done, to the school, that house founded upon the rock of pride and prestige.

In normal mood. Not now! Hester was capable only of faint gratitude to her Mother and Julia,

and of solace in their affection for her treatment at Holtham's hands, the end of all her hopes, the defeat of all her prayers for her husband. And, gratitude to Lade and Guard, and Marley, that at the gates of Carrick House they had said "good-bye", leaving her and Rosa Anne with Mrs. Carrick and Julia, and not intruding on her, and troubling her by their presence in the house. Lade only had spoken of Holtham's conduct. He had said that he would try to find Holtham in the morning, and induce him to consent to a deed of separation. Hester had not answered, feeling only indifference; her bruised cheek had throbbed and burned under her black veil.

Mrs. Carrick and Julia had shown similar tact and kindness. Hester must rest, Mrs. Carrick had said simply; her room was ready for her; she should lie down and not be disturbed. Julia had taken charge of a shy and delighted Rosa Anne, responsive to her aunt's caresses, not shrinking from her. Hester, having seen the child safely in the little bed prepared for her, with Julia to play nurse, to administer hot milk, and to talk gay, soft nonsense to Rosa Anne, had gone to her room, incapable still of full realization of the cruel insult and its effect on her after the departure from Holtham's home, and the return to Carrick House; incapable of other thoughts of her husband than horror and disgust.

For the gloom of the late afternoon and the early darkness, candles were set before the dressing-glass. The fire was burning brightly. On raising her veil and untying her bonnet strings, she saw clearly the reflection of her face, with the bruise vivid against its pallor; instantly and inexorably

her mind re-enacted the hateful scene: the reeling figure in the doorway, the senseless oath and the cruel blow; the gross and drunken body sagging and falling. Sense of sick horror was counteracted instantly by a wave of passion. She saw, reflected in the mirror, her eyes burning, her lips sneering, and her pallor passing for angry colour. The bruise throbbed and ached.

Through the absorption of her mind in scorn and resentment of her husband, she had no thought of irony in the assertion of her habit of neatness—placing her bonnet in its box, and hanging her mantle on its peg. She had worn, in her flight from her husband's house, the dress in which she had left Carrick House for his home.

She went then to the washstand, bathed the bruise with cold water, and applied liniment from a bottle handed to her by her Mother. She lay down on her bed, feeling weak and weary from the continuance of nervous over-strain, the sleepless hours of Saturday night, and the recoil from the shock of Holtham's unforgivable attack.

Unforgivable?

In her first storm of anger, as now in wan and weak reflection on Holtham's conduct, his drunkenness, the swift decline from the standards of his declared aim yet not of his attainment, his secret habits through the night-hours of his absence from home, surmised by Hester from Lade's words, yet not understood by her, seemed unforgivable.

For the hour till darkness, only Janet came to her room, to bring tea and toast to her. In answer to Hester's greeting, "Well, Janet?" she stammered, with shy and affrighted glance, "We're

all very glad to know you're back, Miss—Ma'am, that is—though I shouldn't have said so, should I now, Miss Hester—Ma'am ?"

Hester said calmly, "Why not, Janet ? I intend to stay a little while with my Mother, that is all. Rosa Anne and I, I mean." She was convinced, from Janet's nod and murmur, "I see, Miss—and very glad too," that the maid doubted her explanation. New and inevitable scandal of her parting with Holtham had started with the kitchen. The servants were free on Sunday evening. Hester guessed the gossip and the conjectures, the reports of maids to mistresses: Mrs. Holtham had left her husband; she had been badly treated; why, her poor face was all bruised: Hester knew the mark on her cheek visible to Janet even in the shadow.

On the maid's withdrawal from the room, Hester rose and sat by the fire, sipping her tea. She heard the bell sound through the house and presently the sounds of dancing, tripping feet, and the murmur of voices and faint, gay laughter, suppressed by Miss Corder's admonition: "Girls! Girls! Silence! Pray remember that this is the Sabbath, not a day for giggling. Giggling! . . . Helen! Helen Millard, how dare you giggle ?"

Hester pictured the bright faces, the demure parade under Miss Corder's eyes to the dining-room; the long, white-clothed tables, the tea-urns, the prim maids and the service of weak tea, bread and butter, with jam and seed cake, for this was Sunday, the day of jam and of seed-cake.

The warm, bright, ordered room, the girls, the

dark merino frocks and the prim aprons, the curls, the ribbons, the dear faces demure only under the eyes of Miss Corder. And after tea the hours of reading, ere the hymn, the Chapter, and the prayer; her Mother's "Good night, my dear girls," and the responsive and respectful chorus, "Good night, dear Mrs. Carrick"; the parade to the dormitories, the flicker of the candles; white beds, white gowns; prayers by bedsides, whispering, and faint laughter; the dimming of the lights by Miss Corder's decree; the shadows veiling youth and beauty; sleep . . . dreams . . . dreams . . . dreams.

How many years since Hester had dreamed as they? How long since she had moved in this serenity, this dignity, and this security? She had the bitter thought that not again could she find the sanctuary of Carrick House: always the thoughts of the months with Holtham, her aim and her defeat, and the crowning insult and rejection of her, must haunt her mind, rob her of peace, and taunt her with failure in her duty.

If she had loved her husband, she might have won. If she had been capable of love for one with the brand, the degradation, of the chain-gang and Port Arthur on him! If she could have merged the memory of her young lover of long ago with the debased and brutalized figure of the days in the house on the New town Road, she might have won, as she had prayed: she might have re-established and redeemed him.

If she could have loved. If only she could have loved! . . .

The bruise on her cheek was throbbing and burning. She thought of Holtham and his awakening

out of drunken stupor, and his mind and mood on finding her gone. She had a shuddering sense of pity for him: she rose from her seat by the hearth, and knelt by the bed, and prayed Heaven that she might be strengthened and enabled to forgive even her husband.

CHAPTER XXXI

MRS. CARRICK AND SOCIETY

MRS. CARRICK'S rapping on the door and question, "Are you resting, Hester, or may I come in ?" : rapping and tone in no sense softened from their old authority, intruded on Hester's prayer. She rose hastily ; she answered, "No, Mamma, thank you. Please, come in—" and with the old habit of polite deference, she hurried to open the door.

Mrs. Carrick, on entering the room, kissed her daughter, and said gently, "Well, my dear child ?" not glancing at the cruel bruise. She moved to the fireside, and sat down in the easy chair. Hester stood by the hearth.

"We thought wise, Julia and I," her Mother said, "not to disturb you, Hester, and to send tea to you in your own room. I felt, and Julia agreed with me, that you would be self-conscious and sensitive—" she hesitated—"even of our sympathy, Hester."

"You mean the mark on my face, Mother ?"

"I shouldn't have spoken of it, unless you had done so, Hester."

"Mother, I've even feared to go from this room to little Rosa Anne," Hester admitted, "lest I should meet the Matron, or Miss Corder, or any of the girls."

"None of my girls," Mrs. Carrick said stiffly, "would presume to approach my apartments

without my express permission or direction. I have not relaxed my rule, Hester, and you should remember it."

Hester was stirred to faint laughter: "I should have remembered, Mother. And I should go now to Rosa Anne."

"No need, my dear. She is sleeping quietly. Julia is charmed and amused by the child: she is so quaint, Julia assures me. Amusing, I admit, Hester, but, I fear, unformed."

Hester said with gentle satire, "And yet, Mother, I've tried all these months to teach her as she might have been taught at Carrick House."

Mrs. Carrick ignored the satire: "Do sit down, please, Hester. You must be weary and weak."

"I do not feel so now, Mother," Hester said, but obeying, sat down facing Mrs. Carrick; and with directness and swift despair she asked, "What am I to do now, Mother? It isn't possible for you to have me here with little Rosa Anne."

"I am the proper judge of that, Hester," Mrs. Carrick said stiffly. "I assured you this afternoon that my home was open to you and your little daughter."

"Mother. Mother, have you really weighed the injury to the school? Have you? Look at me now; my face, beaten and bruised, and me afraid even to creep along the corridor to my girl's room, lest anyone should see me. Ashamed, humiliated, when even Janet saw me. Ashamed, humiliated, knowing how the servants must be gossiping in the kitchen, guessing what has happened, and telling others. Mother . . . Mother, from to-morrow everyone in Hobarton will know that I have left my husband, and why; and why. No one, even

Lady Denison, could save the school from injury, and your pride and Julia's from hurt."

"I am prepared, Hester," Mrs. Carrick said steadily, "for any injury that may be done to Carrick House."

"You mean," Hester said, with brief and bitter laughter, "that when I went to him, my husband, I did all the harm I could do, and that you proved then how little I—anything I could do—could count, even in Hobarton, against you, and your reputation, and the prestige of your school?"

Unwavering, Mrs. Carrick answered, "I do mean this, Hester. Why do you ask this? What do you think to do? You are not regretting leaving him?"

Hester did not answer.

Mrs. Carrick, her gaze intent on her, went on, "Mr. Lade will see this man to-morrow, and force him to agree to the legal separation on which I insist, and you must insist. There will be scandal: this is Hobarton. The scandal will be against him, not against you. You would hide the bruise on your face, you say, even in this house, your home. I approve of this, in the case of my girls, yes. I would not have their minds shocked and affronted by the thought, the knowledge, of such an outrage. But hide your face from others? No! Let the maids see. Let the maids gossip. Let the truth be known as Marley and Guard will make it known in our own circle. As I shall make it known to all my friends and intimates, to dear Lady Denison herself. You think that this will injure you, Hester? You do not know our world. I tell you that the past, the folly of the past, will be as nothing measured against your sacrifice in thinking to

redeem this man. Folly still, but noble folly, Hester. And in return, your treatment at his hands. Your sacrifice, your martyrdom—it will seem, no less, Hester, will re-establish you. You may take your place freely in our circle. If you wish, you may take up your duties in the school a little later. And your daughter, so soon as she is well, may be enrolled as a scholar even at Carrick House. There will be no hurt to you, or to Julia, or to me—no greater hurt than was done long ago. Your sacrifice—Lady Denison termed it so to me—counteracted your folly, my child. And your sufferings, and this blow——"

Hester cried out, "You mean that he, my husband, must bear all this odium and scorn that . . . that, when the cruel truth is known, all I did, all I tried to do, must count for nothing. He must be ruined utterly in his business and in his life, lost irretrievably. Beyond hope of redemption."

"What can it be to you now, Hester?" Mrs. Carrick asked. "You have done your duty."

"I have failed in my duty, Mother, Mother——"

"You cannot love this man still; cannot think of him without contempt and loathing, Hester?"

"Love!" Hester's tone and laughter were hysterical. "Love! Mother, I have not loved him since he came out of prison. I loved him long ago. I love the memory, the phantom from long ago. Love! Why, because I did not love him, I failed to redeem him; failed, if for no other weakness or defect in me. Because I didn't, couldn't love him, and he knew."

"And yet you went to him, Hester?"

"Only for little Rosa Anne."

"But the child is here with you. And peace

and security and happiness, Hester, should lie ahead of you both."

"But my husband, hated, scorned, when everyone knows!"

"Everyone must know, Hester."

"Know without understanding."

Mrs. Carrick said deliberately, "Hester, think of the drunken ruffian of this afternoon, and ask yourself how he can count to you!"

"Mother. Mother. I think of him in all his loneliness and despair, and . . . and . . ."

"Hester," Mrs. Carrick cried, with bitter and contemptuous intonation, "you're not dreaming of returning to him, surely?"

"Mother, I'm not dreaming; I dare not dream. Only, the loneliness, and the terror, and the shame for him. Lost!"

"Beyond redemption, Hester."

"Lost, and I loved him long ago."

CHAPTER XXXII

VISION

NO service was held in Holy Trinity on Sunday evenings. The bells were silent. Hester, left alone when her Mother went downstairs for the evening prayer, stole across the corridor to the child's room. A floating night-light burned in its bowl on the table by the bed; the room was warm from the subdued coal fire. Rosa Anne was sleeping peacefully. Hester took pleasure in the quiet breathing, the touch of colour in the thin cheeks, and the smiling lips, as in the happiness of a dream.

Reassured, she returned to her room. She drew back the curtain from the window, and peered out on the night, having a thought of Holy Trinity high on its hill against a pallid beauty of moonlight and stars, but in truth, discerning nothing, envisaging only the glory of the church, as envisaging the silent bells, sleeping as the night in its silence seemed to sleep. No breeze was stirring, and no rustling of trees was audible. From the town yellow lamps shimmered through a thinness of fog.

And picturing the church—where perhaps a lamp was burning, and the columns and the arches were defined against its light; and the brasses, and the gold thread of the altar cloth were taking a faint and mystic light from its light, or from the union of its light and the imagined silver blue of

the night: and perhaps the Thorn-Crowned Head, the Face of human torment yet Divine resignation, was limned from the precious glass—Hester had a fancy-vision—of worshippers in the church and of herself among them. A congregation of women worshipping and petitioning. She thought of their prayers as the prayers which she was fashioning for Holtham: the prayers of mothers and wives weeping for the lost. She had a sense of the sum of suffering from transportation down the years—men, boys, shipped overseas, given into servitude, like Holtham long ago; herded with the vilest and most degraded—the scum of English prisons: the few redeemed and the many lost: the tyranny, the chain-gang, Port Arthur . . .

And her tears seemed to mingle with the tears of mothers and wives of these men, and her plaint and her protest, yet her prayer, to sound with plaints, protests, and prayers from the church to the Court of Heavenly Justice. And sense of the cruel and irreparable wrong on thousands down the years rolled upon her, concentrating in her pain and pity for the ruin of Holtham, lover of long ago, and husband.

And in truth, she knew the justice of Holtham's hate of England.

No! She grew incapable of hating, or of understanding hate, in this merging of imagination with verities, ruling and fashioning her life. Standing by the window still, and imagining Trinity, its aisles, its arches, and its altar, and imagining the congregations of her experience, and the beauty of the music of her experience, succeeding the music of the bells of her delight, she lost consciousness of place and time. Mystically her spirit

seemed to lament, petition and praise—even as the Psalmist to lament, petition and praise—among the women sorrowing for the legion of the lost, shipped overseas in shame to servitude, the chain, the prison, the solitary cell, the lash, the rope. She sorrowed for Holtham, sharing their sum of sorrow. She heard, or thought to hear, the plaint and terror of the Psalm: her voice seemed pitifully to chant as they were chanting to the lamenting organ pipes:

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? . . .
O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent."

And from the protest and the appeal to the glory of confident sound:

"But Thou art Holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praise of Israel.
Our fathers trusted in Thee: they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them.
They cried unto Thee and were delivered: they trusted in Thee and were not confounded."

And from confident note again to lamentation and fashioning of appeal:

"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.
But be Thou not far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste Thee to help me.
Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling from the power of the dog."

So she stood, in mystic absorption of spirit and soul in thought, vision, of Holy Trinity, as on many a Sabbath morning, many a Sabbath afternoon, she had shared in prayer and Psalm: she had

loved, she had been strengthened by, she had found peace and courage from, austere beauty: the golden stone, dark rafters, pale glass, and splendour of memorial windows: the rose, the gold, the silver and the blue of the high windows above the Altar; the gilding of the Cross, and, this supreme, the sorrowful and compassionate Face, the torment of the Crown of Thorns, the mockery of a purple robe, and the Cross of Calvary pictured in stained glass, and by the utterance above the splendour and the strength of men, the Divine petition: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The memory, the vision, faded from her mind. In bitter contrast she thought of the cause of her failure with Holtham: not his inability to rise out of the pit—out of the degradation of the torment of Port Arthur, but her lack of love for the marred and distorted creature of the prison, whom, in his youth good looks and hope, she had loved. Idle to petition. Idle to cry, "Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling from the power of the dog."

Not loving Holtham. Forgiving, yes: for memory she could forgive. But find in the ashes of dead love hope still of his reclamation—no!

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE AWAKENING

FROM an eternity of fever—sweat and yet the shuddering of cold, torment of thirst; sense of lying on a stone bed, and of being chained, and of being barred and cut off from succour or solace, and through his sodden visions figures moving distorted and unreal, now with the measured tramp or pacing of prisoners and warders; now in the wheeling, reeling rigadoon of the folk of low haunt and tavern, yet always with this movement all about him the dreadful thought: he was cut off from life, association, human companionship, from pity as from love. Holtham awoke in the darkness, lying on his couch.

And for the terror of the darkness he thought himself imprisoned in the solitary cell; yet his mind struggling through nightmarish horror, and his hands gripping the rug spread over him, he grew to believe himself lying in his bed in his own house, and, as on many nights since his wife had chosen to share his life, he uttered a choking, gasping cry, "Hester! Hester!" and thought to hear her placid voice, "What is it, John? Dreams, dreams again?" And he put out his hand to draw the curtain back, and find the night-light burning from its float on the table by the bed.

But hearing no answer, and his groping hands touching no curtain, he must have had the hateful thought again that he was in his cell, having no

memory, of the day's debauch, following the night's debauch, or of his return to the house, the scene with Hester and her folk, or the blow, but that again he touched the rug, and he knew the softness of the cushion under his head: and with swift realization, he understood himself to be stretched on the couch in his study, in the darkness.

He struggled up from the couch, and staggered toward the bell, and would have rung, but from the darkness he knew the night to be far advanced, and he feared by ringing for the servants to disturb Hester from her sleep, and to bring her downstairs, and to let her see him as he must be, recovering from the bout of drunkenness which had blotted his senses with the suddenness of stroke or of swoon. His head seemed burning, and his temples were racked with pain; sick and confused, he swayed against the chimney-piece, and clung to its marble; the very darkness seemed to roll like waves about him.

Now, projecting his mind and memory against the darkness of his brain, as his bleared sight against the blackness of the room, he refashioned, without certitude, yet with fear, the events of the Sunday morning; his sick discomfort, his sense of humiliation yet of resentment at Hester's silent scorn of him, and, at her very desertion of him, needing her tolerance and comfort and exhortation to new endeavour—desertion so that she might go to church; his inability to endure the dullness and silence of the house, and the craving on him for new stimulant and companionship. He could have found in the house drink and to spare, but in his mood of shame and rage, against Hester and

against himself, he had craved, and he had sought, the companionship in the taverns nigh the house. The extinction of reason, of rational act or purpose, must have been speedy from the crude spirits of the taverns, and their influence on his mind not cleared from the bout of Saturday and the week's heavy drinking. But thence?

With sick fear and disgust, and purpose at once to end this doubt, how far he had transgressed and inflamed Hester's anger with him, he groped his way from the hearth to the window, and with shaking fingers he plucked apart the curtains. The dawn was breaking, misty and grey: this blurred dimness was light to him after the shrouded blackness of the room. The servants should be already astir; he need not fear to awaken Hester too soon. He discerned with relief the dull blur of decanter, water jug and glasses in the tray on the table, as he had ordered them to be brought to the study before leaving the house on Sunday. He filled a glass and drank thirstily, refilled the glass and drank again, and with the instant effect on him of feverish thirst allayed, and strength and confidence restored by the brandy, he rang the bell.

Waiting for response, he turned back to the table, but with the thought that his mind must be reasonably clear: he must not be fuddled with drink in making his apologies to Hester and seeking forgiveness—if he had not sinned beyond forgiveness—he hesitated to drink. Then, with the sense of shameful debauch, and of cruel humiliation inflicted on his wife before the eyes of society in the theatre—the affair had been the theme of gossip in the taverns of yesterday—he filled the glass, and was drinking when, with a sharp tap on

the door, and without awaiting permission, Martha, candlestick in hand, entered the room.

She regarded him with grim and insolent dislike. She stood by the door, and did not speak. He asked thickly, "What happened here yesterday, Martha, or last night? How did I come home?"

"You was drunk. You come rolling home mad with drink in the afternoon," the woman answered. "The mistress was here then and her folk and friends were with her."

With horror, yet with dark and bullying passion, he cried out, "Don't use that tone to me, woman!"

"I use what tone I choose to the likes of you," she retorted, snapping her fingers at him. "I do!"

"You will take your wages and your belongings out of my house as soon as it's light."

"Yes, I will," she sneered. "Gladly I will. I'm a free woman, and don't you forget it, Mister Holtham, not the like of the lags in your kitchen, and others as I could name, but won't. You, talking to me! You, after raising your hand to that poor, sweet creature, your wife, as is——"

His look of shame and terror, and his gasping cry, the glass falling from his hand, and smashing on the floor, stayed the furious current of her speech. She eyed him darkly, yet with a kindlier aspect: to his swift muffled words, "I raised my hand to my wife! You don't mean that! I could not have—would not . . ." she answered grimly still, "In your sober senses, you'd not; I'll say that for you, you'd not. But you raised your hand to her because you were mad with drink, I tell you, and you bruised her face, cruel, you did."

"Is your mistress in her room?" he muttered.

"No. She's gone. She went instant, with her Mother and her sister, and that lawyer—that Mr. Lade—and——"

"You mean she's gone to Mrs. Carrick's house? Has she taken the child with her?"

"Why, of course she has. Think she'd leave the little gal in the house with you, in that state? They're both gone; the mistress and her sister carried the little one downstairs, and they all went away."

"Did your mistress leave any message for me?"

She shook her head: "Not with me, Mr. Holtham. No."

He brushed past her, snatching the candlestick from her hand. Like one possessed, he rushed upstairs to the bedroom, and searched the dressing-table, but found no letter, as he had thought. No letter in Hester's dressing-room, or in his own. In the empty rooms, in the neat order of his wife's control of the household, the sense of utter and inexorable loss rushed upon him. An instant in his dressing-glass he saw the reflection of his livid and distorted face; hair tumbled over his forehead, bleared and bloodshot eyes, his chin unshaven, his collar crumpled and sweat-stained.

He struck instantly at the hateful reflection. The heavy copper candlestick in his hand shattered the glass.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MIND OF THE MORNING

FROM the familiarity of the room at Carrick House, as from the habit of retiring early, worn out with the work of teaching and supervising the smooth conduct of the household, Hester slept quietly and without painful dreaming through the night. From the old habit, too, she woke early, and in the moments of half-dreaming thought to rise and dress, and go down to the kitchen, to rouse the sleepy maids, and direct preparation of breakfast.

She checked herself with the sad and ironic thought: how Carrick House and its influence and its placid interests had again enmeshed her! The life with Holtham seemed a dream, and at its close an evil dream, and the peaceful and ordered routine of her Mother's home, the decorum and refinements, against which so few months before she had protested, and from which she had rebelled, took a new and definite value.

She knew that, in truth, the years of Carrick House were stronger in their influence on her than the months in her husband's home: how should a dull and sedate schoolmistress adapt her life to, and reconcile her ideas and standards with, the nature of Holtham's life? And at the thought she judged herself, not him, and in swift and pitiless decision she pronounced herself guilty, and she sought to absolve him; but in her ignorance

of life other than her own, she was confused and tormented by the memory of Lade's accusation of her husband: his associations—associations formed during his terms in the chain-gang and at Port Arthur—must exclude him from her life, Lade and her Mother had said. She pondered with fear and with sense of loathing over the type of such associations, and, having the hateful memory of the leering faces under the fog-blurred lamplight about the theatre on Saturday evening, she was afraid and ashamed. Could her husband affect such company as that?

Yet how the brutal and besotted figure of Holtham, reeling into his house on Sunday afternoon, uttering a foul malediction, and striking her in the face, accorded with her interpretation of the figures from the slums and taverns near the theatre!

She heard the clock in the hall strike six. Startled from her sad depression, again she was impelled to rise from bed and hurry downstairs. Scarcely she compelled herself to lie still. Through her open window she heard presently the subdued sounds of the awakening life of the house. The rattle of wheels, the clatter of milk-cans, the opening of the kitchen door, and a maid's faint giggle. Sound of an axe in the woodshed; rasping of iron as the ashes were raked from the ovens; the murmur of voices; Mrs. Loyne's voice shrill and ill-tempered and commanding.

Restless, Hester rose at last, washed and dressed, resisting impulse and inclination to go down, and take up her duties as of old. This longing, now definite, challenged, but did not exclude from her mind the thought of Holtham, his awakening out

of drunken sleep, and his feelings when he heard, from Martha or other of the servants, of her flight and the cause. She conjectured, and she feared, his course of action: would he come to the school, seek an interview with her, and appeal for her forgiveness and return to him?

Such was the influence still on her from the fantasy, the vision, of Trinity: though of a Forgiveness by which her forgiveness of Holtham could be no more than as a drop of water to the oceans of the world, that she told herself, if he came to the school, pleaded, and promised new endeavour of reform, she would leave Carrick House again, and make a new trial of his protestations, and of his effort at manhood, even though she believed his redemption hopeless.

But oh, if only he would not approach her! If only he were prepared to leave her and little Rosa Anne to this calm sanctuary—if only——!

She knelt, and offered fervent prayer for him, and Rosa Anne, and humble petition for guidance. She rose at the knocking on the door, and she called, "Come in." Janet entered the room with a cup of tea and a plate of thin bread and butter on a tray.

"Oh, Miss—Ma'am, that is—you up so early! And I thought you'd like a nice hot cup of tea to drink in bed while I was lighting your fire."

"Thank you, Janet. Yes. I could not rest. I suppose being back at Carrick House, and thinking that I should be up and scolding you all."

"You never did scold, Miss," Janet said, setting down the tray. "And glad I'll be for one, if you're really coming back to stay, Miss. Like old times it would be. Now you drink your tea, and I'll

rake the ashes out, and make your fire, if it won't be disturbing you."

"It won't, Janet, thank you," Hester said. "But I'll go before I drink my tea and see little Rosa Anne."

"Do, Miss—Ma'am, of course. But don't let your tea get cold now."

"No. I'll be back presently," Hester said, at the door, and crossed the corridor to the child's room.

Rosa Anne was sitting up in bed, colour in her cheeks and her eyes clear. She greeted Hester with a laughing cry, "Oh, Mamma, dear, is it really and truly—really and truly as Aunt Julia said last night ?"

"What did Aunt Julia say, dear ?" Hester asked, stooping to kiss her.

"She said this was school, real school, and I was to go to school if I was a good girl. With all the other girls, Aunt Julia said. Am I, Mamma ? Am I to go this morning ?"

"Not this morning, I think. Not till you're better. And would you sooner stay here and go to school than go home ?"

"Much sooner. Oh, much sooner."

Hester faltered, "But what of Papa, dear ? Have you thought of him ?"

Rosa Anne did not answer. She was staring with round eyes at Hester's cheek. "Oh, Mamma, dear, what have you done to your poor, pretty face ?"

CHAPTER XXXV

THREAT

NINE o'clock. The bell of Carrick House ringing, not loudly but decorously, to summon five and forty daughters of gentlefolk to the schoolroom. Shuffle and dance of feet. Rustle and flutter of plaid and Cashmere frocks, white pinafores, and frills. Tears from Rosa Anne staying in bed. Hester assuring her that she would go to school so soon as she was better; Grandmamma had said so. Five and forty daughters of gentlefolk assembled in the main schoolroom and ranged on the forms at the desks. Helen Millard detected in a stifled giggle: Miss Corder in sharp reproof, "Helen! Helen Millard, how dare you? I shall report you to Mrs. Carrick for giddiness and giggling. Helen Millard! You are giggling still."

Miss Morrell (geography, grammar, writing, history, and arithmetic to long division), in succession to Hester, frowning direfully in support of Miss Corder.

Mrs. Carrick, attended by Miss Julia, making stately progress to the schoolroom, but at the loud ringing of the door-bell saying hastily to Julia, "Pray take my place in school, my love. Make my apology to Miss Corder and Miss Morrell: tell them I am detained in the study. It must be that fellow Holtham. No one else would dare to

ring like this. Hester must not see him. I shall receive him."

"But, Mother—" Julia hesitated: Mrs. Carrick ordered sharply, "Obey me, Julia!—" and walked back to the hall. Janet was hurrying to the door. Hester, white-faced and trembling, was coming down the stairs. Mrs. Carrick checked her instantly: "Hester, I think that this must be your husband."

"Yes, yes, Mamma. I think so."

"You do not wish to see him, surely, Hester?"

"I don't know. I can't think, yet. Yes. Yes, I'll see him, if he wishes to see me."

"Hester, I beg you to return to your room. I shall receive him."

"But, Mamma——"

"Hester, after yesterday, in the light of all Mr. Lade has learnt of this man——"

"What has he learnt of him, Mother. Mother?"

"You cannot think to return to him!"

"Mother, I can forgive. He has so much to forgive us. I'll——"

But her trembling voice was hushed; she shuddered and clung weakly to the baluster, hearing Holtham's voice, thick—drunken, surely—in furious demand of Janet:

"Where's my wife? Where's Mrs. Holtham? Tell her I'm here; I want to see her. Tell her! Don't keep me waiting here!"

Hester whispered, "I cannot see him like this, Mother. Oh, I am sorry; all the trouble I've caused. I——"

But Mrs. Carrick, her head high and her look contemptuous, had swept on along the hall, her silken skirt rustling and swaying about her. Her voice was like ice, addressing Holtham, while

Janet shrank back from him: "Well, my man? What is the meaning of this?"

His look was livid and malevolent; he was already heavily in drink, but not yet drunk, she judged: he muttered thick, "I want to see my wife. I ask to see my wife. I've much to say to her."

"Go into the study," Mrs. Carrick said, and again her voice had authority and scorn, as addressing the assigned servant. Her eyes warred with his eyes: eyes of pride, of cold control, of intellect, and of confidence meeting eyes of hate and passion. She conjectured swiftly that he was not so deep in drink as she had imagined; he was accordingly more dangerous to her, and to the credit of her school. She could have no unseemly wrangle of headmistress with emancipist to form story and scandal for parents or guardians: the prestige of Carrick House was not adamant.

She said hastily to the maid, "Thank you, Janet. You may go back to the kitchen. Close the door!" and she turned and walked slowly from Holtham to the study. She stood by the door and signed to him to go before her. She noted that, even through his rage and hatred of her, the traces of an old politeness shown: he hesitated to step before her into the room.

At her nod he entered the study. She closed the door, and walked to the chair by the desk, and sat down. She said then, "You had better take a chair, Holtham—" pointing to the chair to her left. She was conscious of the conflict in the man for self-control, the twisting of the lips and the clenching of the hands; she attributed with satirical thought, the shaking of his limbs to the drunken

bout of the past week: to no nervousness of her and to no emotion for the thought of Hester.

He did not sit down, but he tossed hat and gloves and cane on the chair, and he leaned towards her, with the muttered question, "Where's my wife? It's she I want to see and talk to—not you."

"Naturally," she said, and touching her nostrils with her handkerchief, for the reek of spirits from him. "But anything you wish to say for her—any word of apology and petition—must be said through me."

"Is that her will or yours?" he snarled.

She answered, "My will is hers and hers mine, Holtham. You do not expect her, seriously, do you, to receive you after your brutality of yesterday?"

He drew back; his head was bowed and his voice hoarse: "No. No. I've no right to expect anything, but Hester is Hester."

She felt no pity, only a sense of triumph in his show of shame and emotion. "No gentlewoman, Holtham," she said, "would endure conduct so gross as yours. No gentlewoman could forgive."

He repeated, with a note of passion through his tone of humiliation, "Hester is Hester. No other woman could—yes, no other woman!"

She said, and her voice rose in scorn and loathing of him, "You count on this, do you? You think that because, from her mistaken sense of duty to you as her husband, in spite of the chain-gang, and Port Arthur, her husband, she chose to share your life on your liberation, believing that she was capable of your reform, you may follow the course of life, and the habits of life, and the associations natural to you: you may shame and humiliate her

in the eyes of society: you may come drunken into her presence, and the presence of her folk and friends: you may use hateful words to her: you may strike her brutally, and be forgiven. You count on the splendour of her self-sacrifice for her tolerance or her forgiveness of you, through all the shame and sins of your life. Tolerance and forgiveness of you, Holtham! I marvelled at your effrontery long ago. I have ceased to marvel."

She had grown careless, in her contempt of him, of probable outburst from him, and of the sound of oaths, invective, and denunciation of her, reaching the schoolroom and the startled and scandalized ears of five and forty daughters of gentlefolk. She had so far departed from her law of restraint that her voice had risen to a note of shrillness, of which, intuitive of his struggle for control, and his determination to avoid outbreak, not to be stung by her into new show of weakness or of inferiority of will to hers, and from his apparent show of sense of advantage, she was ashamed; she countered instantly by the calm question, "If not, why are you here, Holtham?"

"I have told you," he muttered. "Only to see my wife—" and with dark passion, "I seek pardon from her, not from you, Mrs. Carrick; I promise reform to her, not to you!"

"Promise! Promise!" she said, with satiric intonation. "My daughter, from her brief life with you, my man, has learnt a fitting estimate of values."

"Mrs. Carrick," he said, now with mastery of himself even through that dark passion, that fever of mind, from the morning's drinking, barely restrained, and menacing the balance in the conflict

of their wills, "I say I am not here to petition you. Even to let me see my wife. You shall not keep her from me."

"You were always an insolent rogue, Holtham," she said impassively. "You learnt nothing from your punishment. Now you delay me from my duties: hear my answer to you. You plead to see your wife, so that you may crave pardon and offer promises . . . promises . . . if only she'll return to you. My answer is that you shall not see her, yet. I shall place before her, fairly and fully, all you have said to me. I shall influence her in no way, except that I shall urge her, if she consent to receive you, to insist that the interview take place in the presence of Mr. Lade. Now go!"

He said, with restraint still, but in a tone of a significance sinister to her, "Are you wise, Mrs. Carrick, in taking this attitude always toward me? You count much on the prestige of yourself and your school. You are proud of your social position, and your favour with Government House, and the brilliance of the match your younger daughter is to make."

"I have a cause for pride," she said, head high and gaze cold and clear. "I may have had cause for shame in the association of my daughter with such as you, Holtham, but I bow to the judgment of society: she has atoned by her devotion to her husband, by her sacrifice, by all her efforts to redeem you. Even though you be beyond redemption. The knowledge of a blow will ensure society's approval of her separation from you."

"The knowledge of a blow!" he repeated, with colour showing through the livid hue of his face. "I am not given, in my sober senses, to a brutality

like this against any woman, against my wife, my honoured and beloved wife. I am not given even to threatening women such as you."

"You are insolent and threatening," she said, rising, and moving slowly toward the bell rope. "I shall ring for my servant to show you from the house. Do not return, my man."

He interposed instantly between her and the bell rope. Inflexible yet startled eyes warred an instant with burning, blood-shot eyes; he muttered in a voice so thick with passion that, despite herself, she wavered, "I say I'm not given to threatening women. But I warn you, woman, I warn you, that if you keep my wife from me—my wife and my child from me—I'll not be silent: I'll not conceal aught you and your husband plotted against me long ago!"

"My lawyer will protect me from slander, Holtham."

"Your lawyer may win a verdict for you against me," he said, with thick sardonic laughter. "He may, but he'll not clear your name. He'll not set you in your place again; head of this school, and fit to teach the daughters of gentlefolk. The daughters of gentlefolk! Teach! You to teach! You to profess piety! You! There's the ring I was gaoled and chained for: will Hester swear against me that it was stolen? The ring, and the plot, and the ruin, and the misery for me: and you taunting me with my degradation! There's the child, the child, sick still and weak from the hag Wing, to whom you gave her. So's to save your name, the Carrick name. Name counting more than truth, more than piety, more than honour The law may seem to clear you, if you

appeal to it, but you'll not be cleared. Never, in all your life, will you be cleared!"

She did not speak; she did not tremble; she passed by him, stretched out her hand, and rang the bell. He snatched up hat and cane and gloves and stumbled to the door.

"I'll see my wife," he muttered, looking back at Mrs. Carrick. "I'll have my wife and child back, I will. I do not threaten women, but I warn you—woman!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

MRS. CARRICK IN DEFENCE

MRS. CARRICK expected the crash of the banging door to sound through the house in proof of the violence of Holtham's passion; she even raised her hands to her ears in anticipation. She wondered at the quiet with which he left the school. She ordered Janet, answering the bell, to ask Miss Hester, she used the old name consciously, to come to her in the study.

Hester appeared, pale and wide-eyed: her questions were immediate and tremulous: "What did he say, Mother? Does he expect me to return to him?"

Mrs. Carrick had sat down at her desk, and had taken pen and paper. "He appears to suffer from the delusion that you will, Hester."

"He had been drinking, hadn't he?"

"He had been drinking, yes, but I do not say that he was drunk," Mrs. Carrick said calmly. "Will you forgive me if I write while I talk to you? I must send a note at once to Mr. Lade, and ask him to come to see us to-day. And I'm very late for my classes. The date? Oh, yes, 8th August—" consulting the little almanac on her desk, and writing.

"Mother," Hester cried out in protest, "How can you be so cold and callous?"

" 'Dear Mr. Lade' . . . Callous, Hester?"

"Mother, I don't say this harshly. But to sit there writing, when you must know how I care to hear what has happened, what my husband said, and all it means to me?"

"He said very little worth repeating, Hester. He was threatening, and, I think, dangerous: that is why I am writing to Mr. Lade . . . 'Holtham has called——' "

"Mother, please! Tell me. Don't torture me like this!" Hester cried. "What can he threaten? How can he harm us more?"

Mrs. Carrick laid down her pen. "As you insist, Hester, I shall tell you. He was in the state to be expected, after so many days of drinking; unbalanced, violent, and malignant in his mood. He demanded to see you, at once, of course. I refused this, on your behalf."

"Mother; why should I refuse to see him?"

"Your pride should tell you, Hester. I judged wise, from his condition, his mood, not to allow an interview. I agreed to report to you faithfully all he had said. He wishes you to return to his house, with the child. He will appeal to you, but to you only, for pardon for his brutality, and his drunkenness. He will promise reform."

Hester's question was challenging, "Did he say that he would promise to reform—to you?"

"No," Mrs. Carrick answered imperturbably. "He said that he would ask pardon only of you, and promise reform only to you."

Hester said with dejection, "I might forgive, but I could not believe his promises of reform."

"You might forgive, Hester? How can you think to forgive?"

"The blow! He would not have raised his hand against me but for his drunkenness."

"Hester, you cannot—you do not understand," Mrs. Carrick protested. "A blow; it was unforgivable, and it was not all."

"All to me," Hester whispered.

"Because, I repeat, you do not understand," Mrs. Carrick said, her tone insistent, but her eyes averted. "Hester, not Lady Denison's request—it might be a command to others, though not to me—sent me to your house yesterday to offer you the protection of my home. You have moved secluded and apart from life, as I, secluded and apart. You have no thought, and I scarce comprehension, of the nature of this man's life."

"I know that he has been drawn back inexorably by the past, Mother," Hester said. "I know that we—my father, you, and I—not knowing, condemned him to the chain-gang, and that hateful prison. I know and I tried, hard I tried, to make amends. And amends to my child, Mother, for the cruel years . . . years when she had a right to happiness, as any child, but——"

"Hester," Mrs. Carrick interposed, with an emphasis and earnestness strange to her daughter, "you must accept my assurance—I demand this as a right to me, a duty to me, your Mother: you must believe this—I had no knowledge that the man was not guilty of the theft; your father had no knowledge, if Holtham were not guilty of the theft. Separate you, yes: place him beyond reach of you, or influence over you, to dishonour your name, our name, yes, but not through perjured evidence, not through conspiracy. We acted as we believed. And this woman, who was chosen

to adopt the child, paid to adopt her, and to bring her up happy and well-cared-for, and taught our faith, was recommended to your father as honest, hard-working and God-fearing. Whatever the effect on this man's life, whatever the hurt done to your child, and to her, at least, I think to make amends, having her here, teaching her, making her my charge, my trust, my darling even, Hester, we acted in all faith and honour, Hester. I tell you I am innocent of conscious wrong to you, or to your child, or to your husband even, Hester."

"Admitting wrong—" Hester began: her Mother checked her with imperious gesture, and with insistence still. "If there were wrong, Hester; if any fault or blame attach to us, you have atoned. I am not hypocritical, you know this, Hester. My life is no whited sepulchre. I have my standards, my creed—it may be narrow, but I adhere rigidly to my creed. And by my standards and according to my creed—they should be yours, Hester—Holtham, as Mr. Lade has shown him to me, and this proven by the reports of the police to Mr. Lade, is unfit to share the life of any—any gentlewoman, Hester: of any woman of natural pride, and honour, and belief in Christ, and in His teaching."

"Mother, last night I thought of Trinity," Hester whispered, "and I think I dreamed of Christ, and forgiveness, and its divinity. I think, humbly I think, to forgive, as I pray to be forgiven. I have forgiven the drunkenness and the blow."

"Hester, the nature of Mr. Lade's report is such," Mrs. Carrick persisted, "as I care not even to remember. I blush even to repeat to my own daughter. I cannot repeat all. Holtham, in all his life with you, has not striven to rise beyond the

associations natural to him. He has been seen on many nights in the lowest taverns in the town."

"But I know this, and can forgive this, Mother."

"Forgive, then, his association with the scum of English gaols and hulks, transported, like him, to this country. Forgive association with thieves and ruffians such as you saw, you must have seen, about the theatre doors on Saturday evening, Hester. But . . . but he associates with the drabs of the streets—that I should have to speak of such to you, my daughter—the painted women of the streets. He returns from the company of such to you, his wife, and he professes tenderness, and promises reform. Now I must go to my class, Hester. If you must weep so, pray lock the door, after I go out. Or hurry to your room. I cannot have my girls see you like this. I shall send my message to Mr. Lade at midday, and ask him to come here this evening."

CHAPTER XXXVII

SANCTUARY

LADE'S answer to Mrs. Carrick's letter, sent by messenger, was that he must be detained in his office by appointments till late in the afternoon. He would have the honour of waiting on Mrs. Carrick that evening; Guard begged leave to accompany him.

Hester passed the day in the seclusion of her room though longing for the open air and the pale spring sunshine, and lured by glimpses from her window of the gold of jonquils, the silver light of narcissi, the purple border of violets, and the scarlet of japonica, in tribute to the spring, decorous tribute, from the clipped, trimmed, and disciplined garden of Carrick House. She found in the dance of narcissi in the breeze and to the sunlight the gaiety of the daughters of gentlefolk, out of sight of Miss Corder and Miss Morrell: gaily and giddily the blossoms fluttered, like little dancers in silver tarlatan and daffodil silk.

From the playground the laughing voices sounded merrily—and the voice of Miss Corder, decreeing decorum, sounded shrilly—to Hester sitting with Rosa Anne later in the afternoon: the little girl, bright, and eager to be out of bed, had no heed for Hester's reading of a fairy story.

"Grandmamma says I'm to go to school soon as I'm better, Mamma, if we stay here with her. To-morrow may I go?"

"Not to-morrow, I think, dear," Hester said, faintly resentful of her Mother's tactics.

"But why? Why not? Why can't I? We are going to stay with Grandmamma and Aunt Julia, aren't we?"

"And leave Papa?" Hester asked sadly.

Rosa Anne weighed the question gravely. "But isn't he to stay with us, too, Mamma?"

"No, dear; no."

"Oh! But then he wanted me to go to school here, you remember?"

"Yes, Rosa Anne, but you should forget, though it doesn't make any real difference, child. You'll go to school here like any other little girl, whether we stay here or go back to Papa."

"But Grandmamma says——"

"Grandmamma was only teasing you, little silly. You are to be a good girl, and to be quite well to-morrow."

"And then go to school?"

"I hope so. But are you sure you wish to? Listen. There is Miss Corder now, and she'll be your teacher."

"Helen! Helen Millard! Go into the schoolroom at once, and write out for me twenty times: 'I must not scream!'"

"Do you think you will like Miss Corder, darling?" Hester asked.

"Oh, no, but I'm sure I'll like school, and Helen. Is she pretty, Mamma?"

"Very pretty. She has fair hair and blue eyes. But she is giddy, Rosa Anne, and she screams loudly when she is excited. You heard Miss Corder?"

"Is Miss Corder a little girl?" Rosa Anne asked.

"You silly child, of course not!"

"And she isn't pretty, is she?"

"She is very clever and good, Rosa Anne."

"Yes, but that isn't the same, Mamma. She isn't a little girl and she isn't pretty. So perhaps she doesn't like Helen."

Hester did not answer. From the shadow of the curtain she looked down on an angle of the playground. The sunlight, through a powder of golden haze, touched the stone-flagged yard. Hester saw the fluttering of white pinafores and of frills, and of tresses fair and tresses dark; she saw the faces of the girls; Miss Corder's trim grey figure; the laughing voices rose sweetly still. The stone walls seemed to enclose a very sanctuary of peace and happiness and innocence—and of security.

Sanctuary from her husband and his home. The old peace, the safety, and the ordered life and dignity matched against the life with Holtham: his wild moods, his drunkenness and his despair; the blow. The nameless horror of the life which he had sought to keep secret from her.

Sanctuary for her and little Rosa Anne, or the home of the emancipist?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN ANSWER

HESTER, summoned by message from Mrs. Carrick to the parlour, looked hastily at her reflection in the dressing-glass. The bruise showed dark against her cheek; her eyes were heavy and lustreless. She wore the plain foulard gown and no ornament—with the thought to wear no gift from her husband, so long as she was separated from him. She sought and found in the chest-of-drawers a scarf of blue silk, and she draped this about her head and throat, thinking to hide the bruise from Lade and Guard—Janet had announced their arrival, and Hester believed that Henry Marley had come to the house earlier in the evening.

The scarf hid the bruise, but she stood hesitant before the dressing-glass. She was impelled to lay aside the scarf, for she shrank from the implied admission of self-consciousness of, or shrinking from, the eyes of Lade, Guard and Marley. In her plain dress, then, and with her face unveiled, she went down to the parlour.

Mrs. Carrick sat in her arm-chair by the fire; Julia and her lover on the couch drawn before the hearth; Lade faced Mrs. Carrick with Guard to his right. The three men rose as Hester entered the room; Lade greeted her with a smile and nod and the words, "Well, Mrs. Holtham—well, my dear child?" Guard and Marley bowed;

Mrs. Carrick motioned her to a chair to her right: "Sit down here, please, Hester."

Hester sat down, not speaking. Lade, adjusting his spectacles, looked at Mrs. Carrick with an air of question, and at her nod, he said, "I suggested to your Mother that you and she and I should talk for a little while in the study. She thinks that as Guard here is so old a friend, and Marley so soon to ally himself with the family, that there is no need of reticence or privacy: I am at liberty to say all I have to say to you before all here. By your permission, of course, Mrs. Holtham?"

She said instantly, "If it is in attack on my husband, Mr. Lade, I prefer, naturally, to hear it alone."

Guard and Marley rose at once; Lade checked them with a gesture. "I do not think to say anything more against your husband, Mrs. Holtham, than I have said already. And I think with Mrs. Carrick, that Guard's opinion, and Marley's, too, may be of assistance to you, and to me, in deciding on a certain question which Holtham laid before me to-day."

Hester nodded: "Please go on, then, Mr. Lade."

"My dear," he said, leaning forward, "I am so old a friend, I have been so long associated with the Carricks, and I hold you in such esteem affection, that when I knew your husband's conduct—ahem!—was at variance with my wishes for your happiness, I wrote at once to him, declining longer to act for him in his affairs. My letter reached him at his office this morning. But Holtham came at once to my office, and saw me, and he begged me for the very reason which I had given, my friendship with your parents

and my affection for you and your sister, of refusing to act, I should continue to act for him for the time being. I consented when I had heard him out, and when I understood him clearly; I agreed to see you for him, and to ask you to consent at least to an interview with him."

Hester sat in silence and did not look at Lade.

He continued slowly, "I have nothing to urge, Mrs. Holtham, except your consideration of his request. Your Mother and your sister disapprove of any such interview."

Mrs. Carrick assented. "We disapprove, naturally. That was made clear to you, Mr. Lade, surely, in my letter: and to him from my answer to him this morning."

"He told me only that he had waited on you, Mrs. Carrick, at the school, and that you would not allow him to see Hester."

"He told you nothing else?" she asked sharply, and at his answer, "No!" she said deliberately, "He threatened that, if Hester did not return to him—rather, if I prevented her returning to him—he would injure me and Carrick House by charges of false evidence against him on his trial at Richmond—though I gave no evidence—and in the disposal of the child, though I believed, and my husband believed, that the woman in whose care she was placed was trustworthy. Henry, you are long familiar with the facts; our efforts to allay scandal, and to break off all association with this man long ago: Julia was frank with you when first the man was released and came to the house, and Hester thought it to be her duty to leave here for her husband's home?"

Marley nodded. "Certainly, Mrs. Carrick. Julia withheld nothing."

"Thank you, Henry."

"I haven't wavered in the opinion I then formed," Marley said stiffly, "except—" with a little bow to Hester—"that I think now that Mrs. Holtham's decision at that time, of which I disapproved, did honour to her and her courage and her sense of duty."

Hester did not speak still, and did not raise her eyes.

"I agree with you, Marley," Lade said, "even though my agreement implies censure of my own client. Still, I promised Holtham nothing, beyond carrying his request to Mrs. Holtham. He attacked you in no way to me, Mrs. Carrick."

"His motive to placate you and Hester," Mrs. Carrick sneered, "is surely clear to you, Mr. Lade?"

"Possibly, oh, quite possibly," he conceded. "Now Guard here has a word or two to say, he's told me. It affects his partnership with Holtham, and has a more or less definite bearing on Holtham's plea to Hester."

"It has no such bearing," Guard objected, "on any decision Mrs. Holtham may reach. But Mrs. Holtham's stipulation that nothing should be said against her husband—and it's a stipulation of which I approve—prevents me from making my own position clear, in any dissolution of partnership."

Hester started, looked sharply at Guard, and said faintly, "What do you mean, Will?"

"I speak only with your permission, Hester."

"You may speak."

"Frankly?"

"If need be, Will."

"Thank you," Guard said. "Well, I decided, in the light of yesterday's affair—Hester, forgive me—that continuance of partnership, harmonious working together, which has been difficult for some time, had become impossible. I saw Holtham this morning on his arrival at the office. I told him my opinion frankly, and my intention. I urged that the dissolution of partnership should seem to be by amicable agreement. I did not stress the reasons, or the justification, over many months. He listened without comment or defence. He was writing at his desk at the time. He handed me the few lines of a letter; he offered then to have his signature witnessed by the clerks, and to confirm this formally at Mr. Lade's office. In brief, he agreed to a dissolution of partnership on terms absurdly advantageous to me. He asked no withdrawal of his capital from the firm: it might remain in it as a loan without interest, till such time as the house—and it is prospering and its prospects are rich, could afford to pay it off without difficulty. I told him that I could not entertain such an offer, but he stalked out of the office. He went on, I think, to Mr. Lade's."

"Yes, he repeated this to me," Lade assented.

"Again, I say his motive is clear," Mrs. Carrick said contemptuously; Julia protested, "I don't think, Mamma, you should try to represent him in the worst possible light, like this."

"I present him as he is."

Julia laughed. "He's sorry, of course: that is all. And he is trying to make amends."

"Have you become his advocate, Julia?"

"I? How absurd, Mamma!"

Guard interrupted, "You see, all of you, the

difficulty in which he places me. I have not changed my opinion of yesterday's event, and of his treatment of you, Hester. But if you wished, if you thought fit—if——"

Hester said swiftly, "You mean that if I returned to him; if I forgave him, you would continue in partnership with him; is that it, Will?"

He nodded. "Yes. But I do not urge this in any way for your consideration before reaching your decision, Hester, of course. I shall be guided only by your wish."

"Understanding him as he is," she said dully, "and as I understand him."

"I think so, Hester," Guard said. "A spirit warped, distorted, and yet capable of splendour."

She rose: she said, and her voice from faintness and huskiness, as she spoke of Holtham, grew clear: "Yes, Will, yes. A spirit capable of splendour. Warped: ruined: made what he seems but is not. All of you saw him yesterday, in his shame and degradation, and his cruelty to me. But he isn't capable of cruelty to me, to any woman, when he's sober, when the dark moods aren't on him—and they're like madness, and they are born from all he's suffered through those hateful years; all the brutality and all the degradation, all those days and nights of solitude, all those years in prison. Oh, Mr. Lade; oh, Mother, Julia, Will, he isn't what you think him! It isn't he, so hateful and degraded; it isn't he. I couldn't have loved him long ago, if that had been the real John Holtham; I couldn't have thought of him. I couldn't have gone to him and tried to do my duty to him when he came out of prison, if it hadn't been for the memory of the real man. They made him what he

seems; Port Arthur made him what he seems. It's just as though . . . as though he were possessed, like . . . like one who was healed, in the Scriptures."

Mrs. Carrick protested bitterly, "Hester, you're not thinking to forgive this creature and go back to him?"

"I didn't say that I'd go back to him, Mother."

"You'll not see him, then?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Hester, pray consider——"

"I have considered, and I have decided," Hester said. "Mr. Lade, you may tell my husband that I shall see him to-morrow."

"At my office, at three o'clock, I suggest," Lade said. "I'm engaged with clients all the morning.

"Yes, at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER XXXIX

TIME OF WAITING

FOG held Hobarton in the August night. Light of lamps and from windows was blurred and indefinite as the thought in Holtham's mind: Lade would surely go to Carrick House that evening, see Hester and receive her answer to Holtham's plea for an interview. Holtham, in his unrest, in the fever of his brain from the drink of that day, could not carry out his resolution to stay quietly at his house that night and drink little, not spend the hours in tavern or low haunt: he must be clear of head; his eyes be sane, not bloodshot and bleared; his hands steady, in this last appeal to Hester for forgiveness, for new trial of manhood, and possible reform.

But Hester? Hester, with the humiliation of the scene in the theatre yet vivid to her mind, the drunkenness of Sunday, and—oh, incredible baseness—the blow! How contemptuously Lade had spoken—Guard had spoken—that day! How the scandal had spread, been noised about Hobarton! The publicity given by the newspaper to the scene in the theatre, the riot, the insult to the Governor, and the man John Holtham's prominent part.

He had not been able to ignore, though he had faced boldly, the contemptuous stare of officials and free colonists since his liberation, as he passed daily through the streets of Hobarton. He had averted his eyes from hostile eyes this day, having

a bitter sense of shame on him for the hurt to Hester; Hester, with the mark of his hand—his signet ring—on her cheek, Lade had said. Hester—she had not loved him since his liberation from prison and her consent to share his life. She had done her duty only, as she had interpreted her duty. Sacrificing herself for him; and he longing for, aspiring to, the precious guerdon of her respect, her love even, with the passing of years of honourable living; aspiring to Paradise and sinking more deeply in this Slough of Despond.

His pride, the force which had sustained him through the years of sentence, equally with his love for her, rejected attempted justification of himself, or the defence that for all his sins the prison—the System—was responsible. For the sense of degradation, yes; for the black moods and terror of despair, yes; for his recourse to the bottle, the heat and the stimulant of brandy, no! He had vowed long ago that, for Hester, for his love of Hester, and his pride, his spirit should not be broken: the chain, the lash, and the solitary cell should not prevail against his spirit; torment of body and mind should not destroy his soul. He knew and cursed now the victory of the prison; he knew and cursed the weakness of his soul; in the defeat his degradation lay.

And in his admission of defeat, and knowledge and hatred of himself, he sought and found, that day, the palliative of brandy. He drank deeply, madly, and from the fiery influence of the spirit he assumed a wild elation and arrogance: Hester would return to him; he had a right to demand his wife and child; the Carrick woman should not withhold them from him.

He had ridden into town that morning, and he had left his horse at the Phoenix Tavern, and, with the determination to be the master of his mind for that night and for the morrow—if Hester should consent to see him—he left the waterside, and resisting impulse to find oblivion in the tap-rooms, he took his horse late in the afternoon, and rode for his home. But he was now deep in drink; he reeled in saddle, and in defiant mood, he rode at a gallop up Macquarie Street and into Elizabeth Street, in clear view of society ending its round of the day, of the Government officials and soldiers, and of the comparatively few clerks and shop-assistants, labourers, and teamsters, released from work at that hour of the afternoon. He forced his horse through the traffic of carriages, cabs, saddle-horses, and pedestrians. The huge, swaying figure on the high black horse was recognized by many. He heard jeers and laughter for his clear state of intoxication, and savage protests from drivers whose right-of-way he had ignored.

He appeared to heed nothing, pressing on his horse, and going at a mad speed up Elizabeth Street, his high hat crushed down on his brows, and his greatcoat loose and flapping about him, a black-clad figure, livid of look and burning of eyes; high on the galloping black horse. He swept out of Hobarton to the house on the New town Road, and reached his home capable of control still, though heavy and weary with his drinking through the day, and the need of rest from the impost on his strength by the carousals of the past week and the feverish sleep which had meant no rest or respite to him.

Martha had left the house. The assigned

servants, with discipline removed, had made a sorry pretence of performing their duties. The house was dusty and ill-tended; the windows unopened, and study, dining-room, and bedroom, close and heavy with the stale fumes of spirits and tobacco. His return had not been expected.

His dark rage, oaths, and invective roused his man from the lethargy of drink stolen from the cellar. Holtham made no change of dress, and did not shave his chin of the dark stubble of two days. He was served with an ill-cooked meal; he ate little, but he drank heavily.

Sitting alone in the dining-room, solitary amid its splendour of plate, of mirrors, and the silver light of candles, the dull gleam of dusty mahogany, and the glitter of fine glass, with Hester's chair set in its place in reminder of her desertion of him, in the silence; with the flutter of the candles in the draught from the windows which he had ordered to be opened for coolness—on this foggy night, and the low burning of the coal fire, he had a horror of himself, cruelly reflected in the high glass which he faced. His features seemed blurred and swollen and besotted and livid, so that his hair and his unshaven chin showed coal-black, and his eyes like rust-red steel; his dress dusty and disordered, his collar sagging, and his necktie loose from its ring.

He had a thought and fear of an infinity—it seemed in prospect to him—of days and nights as lone as this lone day and night, and fevered with the deep drinking capable not of elation to him, but only of profound dejection. He thought of himself through those years ahead as solitary as in the cell of punishment at Port Arthur, and by

his past and by his vices, his spirit fettered as heavily as ever his body in the chain-gang.

Yet, in his shrinking terror of the future, he admitted the justice of Hester's desertion of him; he confessed no right to invite her to return to such as him.

He stumbled up from the table, overturning his glass. He thought to exclude the hateful vision of himself. He moved to the window, and, with the air cold upon his brow, his fever seemed allayed, and his brain clearer. The craving for Hester, as always in his normal moods, his love of her, grew acute. He thought to find Lade that night and learn her answer; whether she would see him, and listen to his apology and appeal; this thought at least grew definite.

Lade would visit Carrick House that evening, he had said. Holtham conjectured that if he waited about the gates of the school toward ten o'clock, he might intercept Lade, and learn his wife's decision. His fumbling fingers sought his watch. His eyes, dim and rolling, could not discern for him the dial and the hands of the watch, and determine the hour. He heard the clock in the hall strike eight, while yet he strove to learn the hour.

Lade was unlikely to leave Carrick House for two hours yet, but Holtham, in his hatred of the lonely house, with the tax of drunkenness on reason, finding illusion in every sound or play of light, the rustle and flutter of the curtain in the draught and the flicker of the candles—hearing voices, and seeing forms and faces, which all were hostile to him, Hester's among them—determined at once to go to Carrick House.

He endeavoured to dispel his black thoughts and to compel reason to triumph over the fumes of brandy. Hester would forgive him, would return to him. Hester was, above all other women, finer and nobler. But reason was insistent that he had no right to claim new sacrifice from her, new and splendid sacrifice. He could promise, but not keep his promise. He had no right, but the thought of life without Hester was as madness to his brain.

He walked to the door, wavering in his gait; and, conscious of a weakness, and tottering of his limbs, and the cruel throbbing at his temples, and the response of his brain like hammers beating on stone, he struggled back to the table, and filled his glass, and drank. So, in restored and fiery strength, he strode from the room, put on his greatcoat and gloves and hat, and took his cane, and unheeded by his servants, he escaped from the hateful house into the cold and foggy darkness.

The purpose formed by reason left him, and oblivion overtook him, enveloping him even as this darkness, yet led him, like a sleep-walker, across the New town Road, and by the lane into Argyle Street, and on toward the gate of Carrick House. Fog held the hill as the hollow, swept up from the river before a low and bitter breeze. Through this darkness he moved to the school gate. The pallor of the high lantern above the gate, coming blurred through the fog, caught by its contrast, and controlled, mind and memory. He leaned against the gate, and peered up toward the house, and was conscious of the high blur of lights from its windows, and of the faint murmur

of voices, and of the clanging of the bell for evening prayer.

The mad impulse had been his in a brief flicker of reason, and understanding that this was Carrick House, and that his wife was in the house and withheld from him, to rush up to the house, and force his way to her presence, and demand her return to him, even by force to snatch her out of her Mother's keeping, and compel her submission to him. He was affected by the measured strokes of the bell as by the bells governing the routine of his life at Port Arthur.

Impulse passed with understanding. He swung about, and stood to attention, imagining the warder's command. He walked then, as in the ranks of a gang from the Port Arthur quarries, down the hill. He went through the darkness toward the taverns.

Having no knowledge of his actions—reason.

CHAPTER XL

THE CODE

THREE o'clock on Tuesday afternoon. Mr. Lade's office in the Stone Buildings—a mellow room befitting Mr. Lade: mellow glow and gleam of fire on cedar desk, on brass of fender, of nail heads in green baize-covered door, on safe, on the bindings of law calf, on the glass of choice prints, and on Mr. Lade, sitting at his desk, facing Holtham, and on his spectacles and on the seal ring mellow on his fine, white hand.

He thought, eyeing Holtham, unshaven, unkempt with his linen crumpled and his cravat disordered—as he had thought from the emancipist's first interview with him—of the incongruity of such a client with his office, with his firm, its dignity, and its associations. He had understood the arrogance and extravagance of his client new from prison and new to fortune, his manner of speech and dress; he had been tolerant of, even sympathetic with, him; the fellow, self-conscious, sensible of his disgrace and the brand of prison on him, had sought protection in his very assertiveness, just as the wounded spirit, the mental unrest, and the moods of black depression, had demanded and incited the fits of drunkenness.

He had not known Holtham—now tolerably sober—in this mood of truculence, or with this look of ruin, degradation, upon him, or even this slovenliness of dress on him. He conjectured

coldly the possibility of error in his original judgment of a fineness of quality in the man, not wholly lost or destroyed by the chain-gang and the prison, and he estimated the effect on his own mind, and his attitude toward Holtham, from his sense of repulsion, since the revelation of his life, and the gross and unpardonable hurt to Hester.

Lade grew impatient of Holtham's silence; the dully brooding face, the downcast eyes; he tapped the desk, and said with irritation, "You've surely had time, Holtham, to make up your mind, and give me an answer."

Holtham said, scowling at him, "Easier for you to ask the question, Mr. Lade, than for me to answer it."

"My friend," Lade said, leaning forward, and pointing with his pen, "against my judgment I consented to act for you and induce Mrs. Holtham to grant you an interview here this afternoon. It's three now, and she'll be here any moment. Now, I've so high a regard for this lady, with all her courage and her devotion to you, though to no purpose, but only to her humiliation and neglect—brutal treatment, even—that, frankly, just as I approved, nay, urged, her leaving your house for Mrs. Carrick's, I tell you that her interests, well-being, security and protection from you, are my first consideration. Not your wishes, my man."

Holtham's face had darkened; he had seemed on the verge of furious outburst. Lade was conscious of the struggle in him for self-control, and of his mastery of himself: from his muttered words, "I'd have this so, Mr. Lade. I'd have you study her and her interests only."

Lade said deliberately, "In that case, Holtham,

I'd advise her not to return to you, not to think of leaving the security of her Mother's house, for such a man as you have proved yourself of late."

"That blow," Holtham mumbled, head hanging and face suffused. "Lade, Lade, believe me or no, as you like, I'd not have dreamed possible any hurt from me to her—brutality—that's your word."

"The right word, Holtham."

"Yes, the right word: brutality to her."

"And the insult to her," Lade said, "the insult of such associations as you have formed of late, the nature of your life."

He muttered, with sick, sardonic laughter. "Of late. I've formed. I've formed! What chance had I of picking my associates, companions, when I found 'em first? Fellow lags."

"Holtham," Lade said, "but that I have, or fancy that I have, an accurate estimate of you, I'd tell you that your defence was pitiful and whining. Contemptible! I say still that your choice of associates lies with yourself, or would lie with yourself, but for your drunkenness. Would you in your sober senses choose to frequent such company?"

"Would any man?"

"No. And that very point again impels me to demand an answer to my question. Your ability to keep your promise, to abstain from drink, as from bad company and evil living, if Mrs. Holtham, even now, consent to forgive you, and return with the child to you."

"You think there's a hope, Mr. Lade?" he muttered; Lade retorted, "Answer my question, man."

He answered deliberately, not looking at Lade, "I could tell her 'yes', and could make her believe me, and give me another chance . . . another chance. I could promise, and wish to keep my promise. But . . . but there would be danger always in the future, as in the past months with my wife, my loved and honoured wife. So I tell you, Lade, I cannot give this promise honestly and honourably. The code we spoke of, all that while ago—you remember—before she came back to me? The code!"

Lade regarded him with searching, not unkindly, eyes. "Not a satisfactory answer, Holtham, I fear."

"No, but the truth." His voice from its muttering and mumbling rolling up and resonant: "The truth, Lade. I could promise, but I fear—no, I know—the past would be again: all she's been through would be again, when the terror . . . oh, call it what you like . . . the shadow—the madness, that's the name—the horror that came on me in the Penitentiary, something stronger than myself, worse than myself, when it rolled back on me. Then I'd drink, Lade. Then I'd be, what I have been, toward life and toward her. I would be, Lade!"

"Haven't you any strength of will or manhood left, Holtham?"

"Left! No. Not always. No."

"Do you think Mrs. Holtham likely to return to you with such a prospect?"

"She'll return, Lade. I know her; she'll return."

"You've more confidence in her, Holtham, than in yourself."

"I know her, Lade. All that she is. I know myself—all that I would be and am not."

"My advice to Mrs. Holtham," Lade said with hard direct look and incisive tone, "is not to return to you, Holtham."

He said, with sombre, jeering triumph on him, "I can defy you, Lade. I can defy her Mother and her sister: oh, I can, if I will!"

"You're not taking into account the natural resentment Mrs. Holtham feels of your treatment of her, and your associations. Saturday night's affair, and that brutality of Sunday."

"All that I'm taking count of, Lade," he said, the note of triumph dying, "but I don't say that I'm going to persuade her, or let her, come back to me. Is that she now?"—glancing at the door at the sound of tapping.

"Yes, I think so. Yes, come in," Lade said, and to the clerk appearing announcing, "Mrs. Holtham to see you, sir," he directed, "Show Mrs. Holtham in at once."

Hester, cloaked and veiled, her head high, appeared in the doorway; Lade stepped forward with bow and word of greeting, and led her to the desk. Holtham lurched to his feet, and moved to the hearth.

Hester, standing by Lade, not noticing the proffered chair by the desk, stood silent, looking at Holtham. She stepped toward him, then, offering her hand, and raised her veil, as though expecting, and prepared, to receive his kiss. The bruise showed darkly on her white cheek; Holtham had turned toward her; dull colour showed in his livid face, as with instant realization of the cruel mark of his blow. He drew back from her;

he did not speak, or touch her hand, or offer to kiss her. She seemed to stifle a sob; she obeyed Lade's swift invitation, "Take this chair, please, Mrs. Holtham—" and she sat down, letting her veil fall.

Lade returned to his seat at the desk; looking with an air of inquiry at Holtham, and at his gloomy silence, "You wish me to put to Mrs. Holtham your reason for asking this interview, and your hope for her forgiveness, and reconciliation with you, and return to you?"

Holtham did not answer; he turned his back, and stood, with bent head, staring at the fire. Lade cleared his throat; Hester said swiftly and tremulously, "Wait, please, Mr. Lade. Let me speak to my husband, and to you."

"Why, surely, Mrs. Holtham," Lade assented uneasily; she said, her voice now clear, now trembling, but always gentle, "On Sunday when . . . when I left my husband's house, I intended, I thought, never to return. I thought his conduct beyond forgiveness. I was so bitter, so angry, so much ashamed. But . . . but thinking, remembering my own faults long ago, and understanding, and pitying, I put out of my mind any thought of punishing my husband by leaving him and not going back to him, but letting him lead his own life as he would. So . . . so if my husband wishes—if you wish, John, I am prepared to return to you, and share life with you and try humbly again to make you happy."

"On a definite promise of reform," Lade intervened. "A definite promise that Holtham here abstains from drink and bad company."

"In the hope," she said simply, "in the belief that he will abstain."

"Asking no promise, my dear?"

"No. Asking no promise, Mr. Lade, but only hoping . . . hoping."

Lade, eyeing the huge figure by the hearth, the stooping shoulders and the bowed head, had the swift thought, the surmise: how should the man answer? How far selfishness, passion for Hester, would contend with, and prevail over the marred spirit: how his dull certainty, his fatalistic sense direct him: how the finer quality—adhesion to the code—determine him?

He felt no wonder, on seeing Holtham swing about, and snatch up hat and cane, and stumble to the door, not looking at Hester; or, when he turned about, to hear him mutter thickly, dully, fiercely, "I don't ask . . . I don't want you to come back to me. What's been would be again, and again. I know it, and you know it, Hester. You've had cause to know. It's ended: trying, struggling, it's all ended. So's our life together; so's our hope ended. No use my pretending, no use at all. I'd drink again—oh, I would. I'd disgrace you, shame you again. I might . . . I might, in drink, though never in my right senses, strike you again. You lead your own life, Hester; I'll lead mine, not here; not here; I'm going where I want to over the world: I am! No one'll stay me, keep me now! That's all I have to say, nothing else. You've got my instructions, Lade. If my wife wants more money for herself and for the child, let her have it, at once."

Hester, half-rising from her chair, stretched out

her hands as in appeal, "John, don't go! Don't go like this. Wait!"

He turned, thrust the door open, and strode out. Lade had the swift thought—the Code! The finer qualities not wholly lost: the spirit triumphing: only the body vanquished, broken.

CHAPTER XLI

THE TRIUMPH OF THE BELLS

THE room was long and low. It was lit by iron lamps suspended by chains from the rafters. With the stamp and thud and shuffle of the dancing feet, the plunge and reel and wheel of bodies, the lamplight wheeled and reeled, and the livid lights and the black shadows were flung and flashed, wheeling and reeling, and spinning, against the walls. Tobacco smoke on the heated and reeking air was of a spectral greyness.

It seemed a *danse macabre* to Holtham, seated in a wooden chair by the hearth, with a deal table before him, wet glasses, and a bottle overturned. He sat, his body sagging, and his eyes blinking at the wheeling, spinning lights and shadows, and the whirling, spinning dancers—waterside rats, seamen from whalers and merchantmen, drunken diggers from the Goldfields, and girls—at the blur of faces, the glitter and flash of tawdry ornaments, the garish colours of dress, scarlet and orange of bandannas, blue of seamen's rig; and grey and brown and black, and white, striped and spotted. From the whirl and swirl of the dancers and the lights and the clouding grey smoke, and the reeling of Holtham's senses and impressions, the faces—gay, laughing faces, fair faces, leering faces, sunburnt, bearded faces—appeared livid and smeared distortions. The mad tinkle and rattle of the piano, against the wall to his left, beaten by an old

man's bony fingers, and the weird scrape and screech of a fiddle seemed to jar and shriek in discord with discordant voices and discordant laughter.

By the greybeard at the piano, and the young seaman playing the fiddle, a woman sat in a crazy chair; she was old and lean and colourless, and clothed in weedy black, with a black bonnet over wispish hair, and a lean, black noose of ribbons at her throat. Motionless and inscrutable she sat, her eyes intent on the dancers, the whirl and swirl of dancers; she was bone-white of features, and bone-white of hands, resting on the chair-arms, Holtham had a fantastic thought of Death—a Dance of Death—to the screech of the fiddle, the rattle and thud of a ghostly drum, and a lamentable chant to a wailing wind.

Begg, gliding like a grey rat by the wall, approached Holtham from the taproom, with a bottle in his hand, and slid into the chair facing him. He drew the cork, filled the glasses, pushed Holtham's glass towards him, and urged him: "Hey! swallow that. It'll put life into you. It'll warm you. You're like the Stone Head at the Tench, you are, to-night, about as live an' livin'."

Holtham took the glass, but did not drink, staring with burning eyes—steel-blue from their red lids; mad eyes beneath black, scowling brows, dreadfully illumining his livid face; he had not shaved for days, and the stubble of his beard was grey-streaked.

Begg ceased his reedy laughter, as if warned by Holtham's aspect. He drew back his chair, and huddled in it, sipping from his glass. Holtham sat motionless still and staring. Begg ventured presently, "Hey; they was mites of yours and mine

in the tap, they was. Ratty Hay and Marty Boyle; you ain't forgot 'em, have you? Of course you ain't. You don't forgit your mites, you don't. A man don't forgit 'is mites, when he's outo' the Tench, if he's a gent o' the likes o' you. Nor them neither. Bin to the Diggin's, they have, an' flush they are. Drink for all hands, and drink an' more drink for me, as was with 'em once. Not proud they're not, no. Comin' in, they'll be, to hail you, and talk about old times, they'll be. Where you goin'?"

Holtham had let the glass slip to the floor, and was lurching to his feet, and pushing aside the table.

Hastily Begg retrieved the fallen bottle: "Not goin' away, are you? Not this time o' night? Night like this. Jubilatin'! Not . . . Hey, come back. Hey!"

Not heeding, and not seeing, Holtham pushed his way through the crowd of dancers, amid protests, oaths and shrill screams, blows; past colliding and collapsing dancers, to whom he paid no heed still; stalking grimly forward to the door, to a riot of voices, to the rattle of the piano, and the screech of the fiddle; and to clamour and laughter raucous and shrill, from bar and taproom to his left, and through the open, lamp-lit doorway he strode from the tavern, without knowledge, thought or purpose.

Down the reeking, running, cobbled way, between huddled houses, to the yellow blur of windows, to the chill dropping of a passing shower, and to the crying of a south-west wind, he made his way, walking swiftly, not reeling, not faltering, and yet not seeing, and still not capable of thought

or aim, to go to his deserted home, or in new tavern of the waterside to find companions, and oblivion still.

Oblivion!

Of his environment, the city and its folk, the sordid celebrants of triumph, in wretched tavern, hovel, slum, from which he swiftly passed, or joyous, honest celebration in crowded streets toward the city's heart. Of cheering, singing, of the music of a band; of high, illumined windows, of rich transparencies, and quaint, in the shop windows and against the glow of lamps or many candles; of sounds of worship—praise—voices uplifted in psalm and hymn, and the high pealing of the organ from church or chapel; of torch-lights and processions; of orators from balconies and windows to cheering crowds, declaring triumph, freedom, and an end to transportation, its shame, and its wrong to humanity. Of rockets soaring against the clouded dark. Of glow of set-piece fireworks through the gloom. Of carriages with prosperous folk, high-hatted gentlemen and ladies rich of dress. Of the wind sounding through the streets, and banging shutters, and beating, swinging tavern signs, and blowing out, above the glow of windows and shop-fronts, the flags—the red and white and blue. Of all the folk of Hobarton acclaiming justice, freedom, and achievement, as they had acclaimed through this great day. Of all who shrank from his fierce onrush and struggle through the streets, and of all who opposed him, and all who protested and resisted, with oath and blow. Of all alike—oblivion!

Yet through oblivion struck the glory of the bells.

In beauty and in sweetness the joyous bells of Trinity had ushered in the day: for the celebration of the abolition of transportation and the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Colony. Sounding to the praise of the Lord, the work of the Lord, they had seemed inspired with a glory and a triumph above earthly: all through their pealing of the morning and the afternoon they had sounded so; they had dominated human triumph and joy of victory, as with the triumph and the joy of Heaven.

Now through the glow of the illumined city against the clouded dark; now through the crying winds—high in their belfry of golden stone above Hobarton, the voices of the bells glorified God, the silver-sounding bells, the golden-sounding bells; having in them all music and all praise; having in them all majesty and all dominion. And the sounding of the bells was comfort, and the sounding of the bells was healing, and the sounding of the bells summoned to worship and to prayer. And the voice of the bells rang as the voice of prophets, priests, and seers, uplifted to the glory of the Lord:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people! saith your God!"

"And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken."

"Awake, awake: put on the strength, O Zion: put on the beautiful garments.
Shake thyself from the dust: arise and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Jerusalem!"

"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places: for the Lord hath comforted His people—He hath redeemed."

And through the day the worshippers of Holy Trinity had offered thanks to Heaven, for a wrong ended and a land redeemed. Pealing organ and voices uplifted had shared in psalm and hymn with a splendour of sound, in tribute and in praise. With the fall of darkness, above the crying winds, above the clamorous city, the bells, the voices or the bells, had risen, to the climax of their triumph. The spirit of the Lord seemed on the bells; the spirit of the House of God upon the bells—always through harmony of tones, deep tones, tones sweet as silver; always through triumph, was borne a beauty beyond earthly: voices seemed ever on the bells:

"Comfort ye: comfort ye my people, saith your God!"

From glare and flare of lights, from clamorous, cheering crowds, from sounds of singing, laughter; from shuffle of feet—tramp, tramp of feet—Holtham made his way, going swiftly, and but for the bells, the sounding of the bells, oblivious of all sound, as of all sights still: though with the blowing of the cold wind on his bare head, and with the beating of the rain, his mind was capable of imagination, and of memory: scenes of terror, as of beauty, in his life, agony of body and spirit, as of happiness or consolation, with Hester; yet these imaginings, these memories, these fantasies, passing with disorder, crowding in confusion, through his mind, as these rejoicing crowds were passing through the streets.

He was not capable yet of grasp, of realization, of himself, his actions and environment, or of his purpose in responding to the summons of the bells, but capable only of response, without reason,

glimmer of thought, of cause, or motive. Stirrings of the mind from lethargy, paralysis of the mind through drink, while the body, like a madman's, was capable of strength and action—were manifested only as visions of the night to dreamer, or as visions of the opium-eater—in his wild passage from the city—through crowded Elizabeth Street, and to left, up the hill, and across untended, gorse-grown stony ground; by monuments, by iron rails, by vaults, by crosses, by broken columns, and by mounds, past cypress sighing to the wind, in pauses of the bells—up to the church itself, on its high hill.

He had no definite thought still of the reality of the church, and its significance, and of its stately beauty to the pallor of the night, when the racing clouds allowed faint luminence from the heavens; or when in flight of rockets, in a rush of light and burst of stars and sparks, the heavens were illumined, and the church in its high glory was momentarily visible—like the mere shadow of its beauty in the sunlight. Only he was conscious now of the bells; to him the challenge and the mockery of the bells.

Services had ended with the day. The body of the church was dark, yet the main door was open; light of an oil lamp struck through the carved stone portal. An instant he halted in the doorway, as hesitant, as striving for thought, for memory, of the stairs and the ladder to the belfry, as he had guessed or imagined the ascent, in church-attendance with Hester.

From the suggestion of his stirring mind, conflict of reason with intoxication: madness: he imagined Hester as a white vision, passing with

bowed head, and entering the church, and momentarily he was impelled to follow this vision vanishing in darkness. He swung to right then, thrust open the door, and to the pallor of a lantern, but needing no light for guidance, for definition of stair or ladder, he ascended. He was not seen and challenged, owing to dim light, and to the tension of the ringers, remoteness of their thoughts from any visitant, and concentration on the ringing of the bells, and his swiftness in passing by them, and in climbing to the belfry itself.

There, in the dimness, he halted, leaning against stone, and having now in truth a definite sense of monstrous form and sound and movement: of monstrous roll and sweep even as of waves definite to pallor of the night; of monstrous sweep and swing and elevation, and of monstrous sound. So nigh was he to the rolling, pealing bells; such was the cold disturbance of the air, such the vibration, such the flood and volume of their sound, that through shock of hearing, shock of feeling, and shock of this bitter cold, in truth his mind was quickened. He had a brief understanding of his presence in the belfry, and a dull wonder, and a fancy of a dream from which he would awaken. Recoiling from the swinging of the bells, he reeled back to the deep embrasure, and against its louvre window he was supported. The cold wind crying through the belfry, and a pale gleam of light showing, he saw the bells, the swaying, rhythmic bells, the shadowy movement of the bells, and the ladder rising high against the wall, to the door left open by careless visitors to the belfry, and to the leaded roof within the parapet, and the high pointing pinnacles.

Yet with the fading of the light, as the cloud blackened the heavens, and the dropping of the dark, this brief gleam of reason—or this crazed wonder—died, and the wild purpose, risen from the depths of mind and his despair, from hatred of the bells, the symbol to him of the hateful years, tormented years, the chain-gang, the labour in the quarries of the golden stone—purpose to see the bells, to cry defiance to the bells, blasphemy to the bells, in the high house—came back to him; yet this was momentary, even as the passing of the sea-wind through the tower. The fantasies, the memories, the visions, rolled upon him, and with destruction of realities—himself, his presence in the belfry, the rhythmic sweep and sounding of the bells, sense of time was lost, and in the chaos of his mind the present rolled into the past, but from his nearness to the bells, and from the volume of their sound, no meaner sounds—of pick-axes, hammers, chisels, and hand-carts, such as he had conjured to him at his own house, on the night of Hester's visit to him—were possible, to summon up for him the chain-gang at the quarries.

Rather, by this boom and roll of sound, his ears were deafened, and all sound lost to him. He seemed in this blackness, huddling against the window, touching with groping fingers the chiselled stone, to be in the impenetrable darkness and the unending silence of the solitary cell. He was assured of his punishment and his torment, and the tragic irony that in this silence, through this darkness, no malediction that he might utter could sound to Heaven or men. He could not recall the duration of his sentence to the cell, or the cause of this supreme punishment; out of chaotic

and fantastic imaginings, he seemed to strive for memory, memory, and failing for the while, he uttered a cry of anguish: how long had he been in the solitary cell and why?

The horror of the punishment had prevailed over his will: not to yield, not to allow, through silence, and through darkness, his reason to be thrown down, despite the solitary cell, the maddening, solitary cell, not to yield.

Struggling for memory still, believing himself yet in the Prison, his disordered mind loosed the inevitable memories of Port Arthur: scenes . . . scenes . . . cells . . . the quarries on the hill; the parade-ground, the yellow stone, and the black iron bars of Penitentiary and Model Prison; a blur of forms, countless forms, now tramping, tramping, in marching order, and now motionless; a blur of grey, blue, black and canary-yellow, and the dragging of iron. Scarlet and the blue glitter of sunlight on steel. The church, the hospital, the Commandant's house, the stone steps, the powder magazine, the wharfs, the Isle of the Dead, the buildings of Point Puer across still waters. Triangles: shoulders straining, quivering, quivering; lash flying through the air. Tramping, tramping, tramping; the ordered tramping. The sullen faces, innumerable faces. Riot, mutiny, all order lost, in a wild whirl of forms and faces surging all about him. Hands tossing, hands clutching, dragging him down, as they had dragged—the System had dragged—him down.

Unutterable horror was upon him. He had a sense of flight, of evasion and escape, of gripping the ladder, of climbing up from this pit of darkness, this haunted pit of darkness, of a terror of

great sound; and, as he climbed swiftly toward the white glimmer of light, of the faces, forms rolling up at him, hateful and vengeful, and of the hands plucking, clawing—and of his passing above them, and of his being in a high place—as on Signal Hill.

But of a low wall all around him, and of thin, pointed towers of stone. Of the wild crying of the winds, and of the quivering and vibration, and the sounding of great bells below him, with a swift rush of realization, as of a sleeper waking from nightmarish horror.

From the belfry of Trinity, John Holtham, with wild eyes, looked out upon the glow and glitter of the city, the rockets soaring, striking across the clouds, and illumining the heavens; of the white-capped Mountain; and from high masts of ships in harbour the burning of red lanterns, and white, and green. He heard the bells high-sounding over cheering, tumult, music. He heard the splendour of the triumph of the bells—transportation defeated; the System ended; the death-blow levelled at the very prisons of Port Arthur.

He had a thought of Hester, and the little girl lost to him; a horror of himself, and yet defiant sense of justification for himself; he had aspired to rise out of the very pit: no man as he might rise . . . might rise——

The System ended; the bells triumphant. John Holtham, creature of the System, stood alone, and thinking himself lost, amid a glory of great sound. He had no thought, no understanding, of the triumph of his soul over the broken body, in the rejection of Hester's offered sacrifice. He had no understanding of the spirit of the bells.

CHAPTER XLII

CHURCH

SUNDAY morning, and the bells of Holy Trinity attuned to the beauty of the December sunlight and the singing of the breeze.

Mrs. Carrick's girls—twenty girls—tripping, two-by two, to church. Miss Corder with Miss Julia. Mrs. Carrick with Mrs. Holtham. Twenty girls walking sedately; flutter of flaxen curls, brown curls, and black curls, flutter of bonnet strings and ribbons; decorous billowing of muslin skirts above stiff-starched petticoats; decorous display of frilled ankles above shining shoes. The governess neat in grey; Miss Julia exquisite in rose-striped taffeta, with silken shawl, and white veil fluttering before rose-trimmed bonnet, little white parasol upraised against the sunlight. Mrs. Carrick majestic in black silk, and floating Cashmere shawl. Hester in black silk and black bonnet, with fine white veil.

Mrs. Carrick, then, and her assistants and her pupils approaching Holy Trinity on the last Sunday morning of the school year. Trinity bells ringing joyously, to Miss Julia, bride-to-be on Wednesday, and to nineteen young daughters of gentlefolk to be released from Carrick Castle by their Mammas and Papas on Tuesday. Rosa Anne Holtham, tripping modestly beside Helen Millard, at the head of the train of Mrs. Carrick's girls, and agreeably conscious of the fluttering whiteness of her

new muslin frock, the starched stiffness of petticoats and frills, and the surpassing beauty of the new white ribbons on her Sunday bonnet. Miss Julia dreaming rather of orange blossom, white satin, and lace veil, than of Mr. Henry Marley, and contrasting the sounding of Sabbath bells with wedding bells.

Mrs. Carrick expressing dire disapproval of Helen Millard's mincing manner, and urging the desirability of a companion not so giddy for Rosa Anne with the opening of the next school year.

Hester in calm conjecture of her husband—fled from the Colony—whether he be alive or dead?

And responsive to the silver beauty of the bells . . .

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